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This dissertation explores the idea of process as it relates to curricular organizing and pedagogy that is critical of an array of sociopolitical oppressions. To establish a foundation for anti-oppressive educational praxis, I engaged in participatory research with two other educators in which we discussed pedagogical strategies and curricular directions for helping both educators and students connect to critical inquiry through experimental approaches and creative projects. Using conceptual artworks as the inspiration for anti-oppressive pedagogy, I consider how both students and educators can explore curriculum creatively, with a broad range of strategies through which they might generate a greater sense of attentiveness to themselves and their surroundings. Drawing from feminist, queer, critical race, and post-structuralist theories, I explore pedagogical dimensions of contemporary artworks by Adrian Piper, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Regina José Galindo, Emma Sulkowicz, Tatyana Fazlalizadeh, Ana Mendieta, and the artist collective Gran Fury. The overall work of this project contributes to scholarship on critical pedagogy, and offers educators and students ways to think about exploring anti-oppressive frameworks through creative processes.

ANTI-OPPRESSION IMAGINARIES: ART,
PROCESS, AND PEDAGOGY

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In a 2013 interview with Rosa Reitsamer, writer, filmmaker, and feminist theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha remarked:

There's a tendency, in the way we raise questions, to focus on results — especially on those all too visible that can be easily identifiable and measurable. Despite this irresistible yearning for immediate gratification, struggles for freedom are carried out not because we think we will instantly obtain results and change things to our advantage overnight but because somewhere inside, we feel our riverbanks breaking open. There rises from our overflowing, larger-than-self state something we want to yell out to the world. Every single seed has the potential to bear fruit, but whether, when, and how that fruit ripens still depends on many circumstantial factors. (p. 121 - 122)

Trinh's claims seem a fitting beginning to this project, as she touches on many elements that are important within the scope of my inquiry: the need for creative strategies to address injustices, an attentiveness to the circumstances that enable expressions of resistance, and a skepticism surrounding prescriptive, quantifiable, and sometimes even legible solutions for addressing complex problems. Though the original context of Trinh's statement is not explicitly about education, I find her ideas to be apt in relation to contemporary educational practices that both oppress and marginalize students by expecting them to conform to hierarchical models of knowledge production and that often leave little room for reflexive inquiry about patterns of power that inform student's lived

experiences. As Trinh describes, routes to freedom can be murky, since they often emerge from a sensitization to injustice that doesn't necessarily include a clear map for how to proceed. The crux of my inquiry within this project stem from precisely these kind of junctions (or as Gude (2012) calls them, “inklings”), in which students and educators have become sensitized to oppression and are puzzling out how to proceed towards increasingly nuanced and complex understandings of the problems they perceive, how to test out potential responses to those solutions, and how to better understand their own capacities for responding.

The pursuit of anti-oppressive action as an exploratory, ongoing process is one that I observed saliently in a course on feminism and contemporary art that I took in my last semester of undergraduate work in Women's Studies. I was intrigued by the ways in which the artists we studied used a broad range of methods and materials for exploring questions about violence, embodiment, identity, and knowledge production. Their efforts struck me as an invitation to consider and challenge my own internalized and self-imposed understandings of what learning could ultimately involve. In considering their works, I found myself becoming curious about how the process of creating artistic projects could function as an exercise in better understanding dimensions of oppression and ways to respond to it. Perhaps because of the way the course was organized, or possibly because it came after being exposed to many other forms of anti-oppressive thinking, I was able to understand that the artists we studied were simply people pursuing complex inquiry through a variety of forms. This new understanding marked an

expansion of my appreciation of possible methods through which to take up ideas about power, marginalization, and justice.

It is valuable to note how this framework differs from arts inclusion, or modes in which teachers use art as a medium for improving understandings of other academic subjects. This framework is currently enjoying widespread popularity in K12 education, with a wide range of scholars advocating for the use of arts to benefit skills in print literacy (Barnett, 2013; Bryan, 2014; Buckelew, 2003; Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013; Saurino, 2004; Stephens & Green, 1997; Wang, et. al, 2013;), history (Dickson & Wallace, 1999; Holt, 1998; Laney, 2007), economics, (Watts & Christopher, 2012), science (Chang, 2012; Strom, 2013; Van der Veen, 2012), German (Knapp, 2012), math, (ArtsEdge, 1996), and other forms of “content literacy” (Barry, 2012). The assumption behind the push for arts inclusion is often that using art as a medium through which to learn about academic subjects will benefit learning about that subject; the emphasis, then, is consistently on increasing content knowledge rather than cultivating aesthetic skill or understanding (Sotiropoulou-Zompala 2012, p. 124). The framework I flesh out within this project does not involve bringing in the arts in order to better understand existing anti-oppressive theories, but rather, inviting educators and students into a process in which, like many of the artists whose projects I examine, they are able to consider multiple angles, modes, and methods for developing their own critical understandings of their sociopolitical contexts. The purpose of this approach is to open the process of creating art to function as a form of pedagogy.

As both a teacher and a student, I have continued to feel drawn to creative frameworks that both explore and articulate alternatives and resistance to oppressive ideas, patterns, and actions. Even prior to the feminist art course, I found myself wanting to incorporate personal photographs into analytical papers, turn in typed work with handwritten observations in the margins, and experiment in other ways with the forms of analysis requested (and often required) to demonstrate my understandings of the ideas within the courses I was taking. In particular, classes that introduced me to ideas that drastically shifted my understanding of the world around me (e.g. by introducing a framework for noticing privilege, or by challenging ideas I previously held about sexuality) often elicited a desire to become more experimental with the methods and materials I was using to synthesize new frameworks for considering power, privilege, and sociopolitical patterns. In order to both reflect and reflect upon the new ways that I was learning how to understand my context, I noticed that, like the artists I learned about in my feminism and contemporary art course, I often wanted to employ a wide range of strategies and materials. Since the connections I was making felt like they related so concretely to my life, I wanted to use a range of ways to both show and understand how these seemingly abstract ideas had concrete manifestations in my life and ideas.

As a teacher, I have noticed that while some students share my enthusiasm for exploring unconventional forms of analysis, others are frustrated and confused by what they describe as a lack of clear instructions on specifically how to execute the prompts I have given them for synthesizing theories about power in relation to their own experiences and ideas. It is not uncommon for students to ask for additional clarification

on exactly “what I want” the outcome of assignments to look like or involve. It is, in part, because of the focus on identifiable and anticipatable outcomes that this question reveals that testing the boundaries of and expectations within conventional assignments seems so important. It is my hunch that when students ask for me to speak more clearly to what I want, their inquiry comes from a learned set of assumptions that is instilled over the course of their, as well as many other students’ experiences with formal education: that the most valuable project is one the teacher can already envision, that students’ intuitions are less important than teachers’ knowledge, and that all possible meaningful connections have already been made — it is simply the task of students to replicate them, rather than to make new links of their own. This predicament is both the reason and a possible starting point for some inklings of my own about the role of creativity in anti-oppressive education. If students and educators can learn to be more comfortable with the process of as well as the need for pursuing questions that may not have instant or clear answers, then perhaps they can become more adept at grappling with the complexities and frustrations of anti-oppressive work.

In order to engage this inkling, I turned to several artists and artworks that seemed to be pursuing open-ended questions about power, marginalization, and violence. In conversation with other educators as well as on my own, I imagined these works as forms of pedagogy of which educators might take note. The artists and works I chose to explore in my third chapter are:

- Mierle Laderman Ukeles: *Maintenance Art* (1973-78)

- Regina Galindo: *¿Quién Puede Borrar las Huellas? (Who Can Erase the Traces?)* (2003)
- Emma Sulkowicz: *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight* (2014-15), *Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol* (2015)
- Gran Fury: *The New York Crimes* (1989), *Bloody Hands* (1988), *Wall Street Money* (1987), *Kissing Doesn't Kill* (1989)

In my fourth chapter, I look at the following artists and works:

- Ana Mendieta: *Siluetas series* (1973-80), *Moffitt Building Piece* (1973), *Rape Scene* (1973)
- Marlene NourbeSe Philip: *Zong!* (2008)
- Tatyana Fazlalizadeh: *Stop Telling Women to Smile* (2012 - present)

I selected these works because they take up a variety of concerns with oppression, demonstrate a range of approaches to addressing inequity, and make use of materials that seemed both evocative and accessible to me. In considering each piece, I concentrated on each artist's explanation of their own works as well as what I perceived to be the methods by which they pursued their lines of inquiry. Each artist seemed to take the relationship of themselves and their actions to the sites they selected into consideration when conceptualizing and executing their work, which is a framework I and other anti-oppressive educators are constantly trying to cultivate when supporting students in building an increasingly nuanced sense of their relationship to their surroundings and their capacity to respond to and within them. In selecting artworks, I also prioritized an emphasis on conceptual exploration rather than technical skill; while many of the artists

do have training in the techniques they use, I chose them because of the ways in which I understood them to be employing artistic process in the service of exploring of an idea, analyzing potential impacts of their work, and exercising reflexivity in their own roles as creators and participants in that work. In considering these elements at work, I hoped to contemplate the overlap and implications for students and educators who might similarly embark on anti-oppressive inquiry through creative processes.

My exploration of creative works as offering windows into inquiry as a process from which both educators and students can learn is intended to offer a means of disturbing these hierarchical, stale models of education — inasmuch, it is anti-oppressive at the level of interrogating education as an often oppressive process. As I explained above, the projects and processes I explore are also anti-oppressive in the content and methods of the questions they take up. From labor practices to sexual assault policies to street harassment, all of the artists I engage with explicitly take up questions of justice that I have either explicitly asked my own students to consider or which I can imagine coming up in discussions about institutionalized racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression. In addition to providing new ways to think about teaching and learning, I see these artists engaging the kind of process that Trinh describes by engaging in struggles for freedom that are both strategic and potentially prolonged.

This project emerges, in part, from my desire to clarify the importance of inviting students into open-ended inquiry in which they have the opportunity to experiment with anti-oppressive frameworks for understanding the world around them and to realize the importance of their own ingenuity. As such, I am just as concerned with exploring and

cultivating pedagogies whose processes disrupt hegemonic norms within education as I am in exploring “topics” or “subjects” that may seem linked with anti-oppressive efforts. For these reasons, the artworks I selected to discuss not only involve engagement with anti-oppressive struggles, but also pursue inquiries in a way that takes both content, site, and form into account. In explicating them for the insights they may lend to curriculum and pedagogy, I attend to both the inquiries they pose and the way they pose them. My approach relates to the potential of anti-oppressive education as I understand it, which is not just in the conversations that can be had, but also in the ways that both students and teachers are able to explore the ideas at stake. As many other feminist and critical pedagogy scholars have discussed (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2000), it does little good to consider anti-oppressive ideas in a way that minimizes the potential for students and educators to experience transformation through the educational process itself. It is from my desire to become more attentive to processes, and to grow more adept at orchestrating frameworks for experimenting with various strategies for pursuing their inklings about anti-oppressive frameworks that I both frame and proceed with this project. In order to clarify my own understanding and hopefully to lend insight to other educators interested in this kind of pedagogy, I have made a series of observations and suggestions about the potential to learn about and potentially resist interconnected forms of oppression by way of making, and for those involved in learning to become more aware and intentional about exercising their capacities for creative interventions along the way.

During and in the time leading up to my work on this project, I have been an educator in various contexts: college courses in Educational Studies and Women's & Gender Studies, high school classes in English and critical thinking, and community education in teaching English to emergent multilingual adults. Though these institutional contexts vary, a goal I carry to all of them is to encourage students to become more attentive to issues of systemic power in the world around them, as both present within and beyond their own experiences. In all contexts, I have asked my students to explore creative methods because I think that exploring ideas in this way can push students to challenge their assumptions about knowledge production and also to possibly make new connections to the material. I intend "creative" in a broad sense as characterizing a range of unorthodox approaches through which students can intervene, unsettle, and interrogate ideas, habits, and observations. In this sense, "creativity" serves as shorthand for the range of strategies people might use to proceed with inquiry and expression, rather than as a descriptor of methods considered to be "artistic."

Underlying my commitment to involving creativity in academic contexts is my belief that creativity is a valuable political skill, since it can provide an active means by which to notice and engage with patterns in the world, to consider injustices, and to become more aware of one's own epistemologies and capacities for understanding and impacting one's surroundings. As someone who believes strongly in actualizing modes that can help people to become more aware and empowered, it has been important for me to remember not to romanticize creativity as a political approach, or to assume that it is necessarily helpful or critical of oppressive institutions. Even while my fascination with

creativity as a conduit for learning about and enacting justice propels the ideas I explore, it is also valuable for me and other educators to whom these approaches appeal to be attentive to the ways in which creative endeavors also have limitations, can be antithetical to justice, and can fail to realize their goals even when justice or freedom is on their agenda.

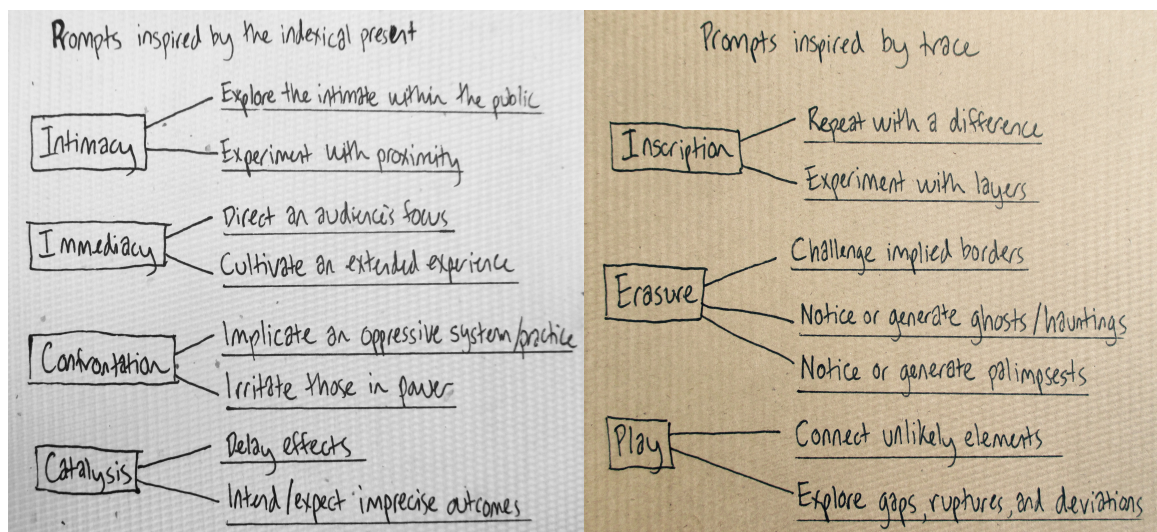


Figure 1. Conceptual Project Map

As an exploration of the potential for creative methods to serve as meaningful parts of anti-oppressive praxis, this project involves multiple dimensions. I identify several main ideas within each theoretical framework and use them as lenses through which to view existing works of conceptual art as inspirations for pedagogy and curricular organizing. As illustrated in Figure 1, the guiding ideas I observed within the indexical present are intimacy, immediacy, confrontation and catalysis. I explore them in my third chapter.

My fourth chapter on trace involves the main ideas of inscription, erasure, and play. Using each set of ideas to observe the decisions, materials, and processes that particular artists involve, I suggest guiding prompts that students and educators might employ not only to think about creative works that already exist, but also to consider potential directions and methods for their own works. These are visible above in prompts such as "Delay effects" and "Experiment with layers."

Throughout my analysis, I retain an interest in the potential of creative processes to facilitate learning about oppression and the multitude of channels through which one might address asymmetrical relations to and expressions of power. At the heart of this work are my own investments in fostering clear understandings of institutional injustices and the ways in which they are connected to and addressable within daily life. As such, I prioritize strategies through which students and educators can become constantly and consistently aware of their own experiences, limitations, and complicities in relation to systems of power.

Presence

The concept of presence is significant within this project as a means of noticing what exists in any given situation or dynamic. On a seemingly simple level, considering presence can serve as way to ask: What is here? How do I know? How do I fit and/or relate? Paired with anti-oppressive analysis, interrogating presence can become a part of building attentiveness to unjust patterns and systems as they emerge in everyday life. Schwalbe (2008) explains this practice as a part of building what he calls "sociological mindfulness," a lens through which "to see more deeply into the process of world-making

and to appreciate the nature of the social world as a human accomplishment” (30). According to Schwalbe, becoming aware in this way “means paying attention in a disciplined way, so that we can begin to see patterns that are not so obvious” (p. 125). There is, of course, never a definitive answer to the question of what makes something obvious, because understanding presence is also an exercise in perception and interpretation. The question, for example, of whether sexism is present in practices of street harassment, or whether racism is present in disproportionate disciplinary actions in schools, is not a matter of whether or not they are present, but rather, of how people perceive them to be present. Becoming attentive to the plurality of dimensions and dynamics within expressions of and experiences within oppression extends far beyond the ability to register oppression in the first place; as I explicate in future chapters, an awareness of presence can pollinate efforts to respond to systemic injustice in nuanced and intentional ways. Inasmuch, my consideration of the notion of presence is in the interest of how presence comes to be understood, expressed, and perhaps even intentionally enacted, as many of the artists I examine demonstrate. As a concept, presence provides a way to consider both what one perceives and how one perceives it, as well as to make links between overarching institutions and one’s own life. For students who struggle to make these connections, cultivating this practice can be especially important.

One way that artists such as Sulkowicz, Galindo, Gran Fury, and the others I included in this project engage with these concepts is through their attentiveness to site-specificity. As Kwon (2002) explains, practices of site-specific art emerged in the 1960s

as a framework for revealing something about a site, which can be understood as a concept that references but is not limited to a specific physical location. Kwon explains that within the past several decades, “The change to conceive of the site as something more than a place — as repressed ethnic history, a political cause, a disenfranchised social group — [has been] an important conceptual leap in redefining the public role of art and artists” (p. 30). Here I see an overlap between site-specific praxis and anti-oppressive pedagogical goals of helping educators and students become better attuned to and capable of responding to injustices. As Kwon explains, “the distinguishing characteristic of today’s site-oriented art is the way in which the art work’s relationship to the actuality of a location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site) are both subordinate to a discursively determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate” (p. 26). Just as they do for artists, these three fields of awareness (location, social conditions, and interpretive frames) also represent the potential for educators and students to intervene, push against the grain, or unsettle practices and relationships that maintain a violent and unjust status quo.

Conversing with Educators

In exploring the ways art can play a role in understanding and enacting anti-oppressive pedagogies, I facilitated a series of conversations with Sara and Finn, two educators and colleagues whose ideas and approaches I knew would enrich my understandings.¹ I had worked with each of them in the past as part of a residential academic program that meets for a concentrated period of time each summer. Though we

¹ For the purposes of this study, these participants selected their own pseudonyms.

worked in different areas (Sara in Art, Finn in Spanish, and myself in Critical Thinking), I always admired their curricular decisions and the ways they interacted with students. I was often struck by how seriously they took their students, how invested they seemed in challenging their students to be active and curious members of campus life, and how frequently they incorporated questions about power and justice into their teaching. At both the summer program and in the teaching jobs they held during the traditional academic year, Sara and Finn both involved their students in extended creative projects through which they could explore questions related to power and oppression. In designing this study, I imagined that it could be helpful to discuss how they understood their choices to pursue anti-oppressive pedagogy and structure curriculum around and through creative processes. Throughout the course of working with them for several years, I formed independent relationships with both Sara and Finn. Though we lived in different geographic locations during the regular academic year, I made it a point to initiate conversations with both of them throughout the year because they were such rich sources of pedagogical inquiry. The conversations we held for the sake of this project were immensely helpful not only in pushing me to interrogate and articulate my ideas about how to frame curriculum and pedagogy in a humanizing way, but also in exploring the primary framework I advance -- that art can serve as a way to emphasize process and in turn to think about pedagogical possibilities that can help both educators and students to continually hone their understandings of power and responses to injustice.

While Sara, Finn, and I discussed our own experiences as educators of anti-oppressive frameworks, we also reflected on missed opportunities for building those

frameworks in our own experiences as students. During one conversation, I mentioned a personal memory from the U.S. government class that I took during my senior year of high school. The curriculum for this class centered around reading from the textbook, defining the bolded words within it, and answering the closed-ended questions at the end of each chapter. As a student who usually did what I was told, I followed this curriculum, but silently wished for something else — a framework that would help me and my classmates to talk about the goings-on at our school, to understand the context for the influx of standardized tests that my teachers begrudgingly prepared us to take, and to critique the very curriculum we were experiencing. I explained to Sara and Finn that, in this context, I often wanted assignments to help me and other students make more direct connections to what we were experiencing, particularly since the fill-in-the-blanks model of curriculum we encountered seemed to put another layer between us and our potential to understand and critique the processes in which we were being asked to participate every day. Reflecting back now, I understand this anecdote to demonstrate my desire for a framework, provided and nurtured within and perhaps despite standard educational practices, that could help to elucidate the political context in which I found myself, and through which both I and other students could begin to explore our own understandings of the presence of educational politics, including both expressions of oppression and the potential to resist them.

Presence in/and Education

The group of thinkers who are my partners in discussion for this project explore the concept of presence in various ways. While Piper (1993) is interested in an

understanding of presence that one can "point to with [their] index finger", Derrida (1976, 1978) explores the ways in which presence can be fraught with efforts to pin down or justify a singular meaning or interpretation. As educators, Sara, Finn, and I each spoke about our efforts to grapple with our own presences within institutions and to help our students become more mindful of how they understand their own. Presence is, after all, often understood as both the starting point and the minimum necessity for proceeding with education. Teachers mark students present at the beginning of each class, and rules about student conduct often emphasize the importance of presence (e.g. no multitasking, no side conversations, no texting) to gaining the most benefit from an educational experience. Yet, as Derrida, Piper, Sara, and Finn suggest in a variety of ways, this version of "presence" is anemic, and lacks the conceptual rigor and personal reflection that could help both students and educators to develop more precise and complex understandings of their relations to their surroundings.

As an example of how complex understandings of presence are already available (albeit sometimes under-theorized) within formalized education, Finn mentioned that students in the public high school where she teaches often break school-wide rules by checking their phones during classes. These rules, Finn explained while Sara and I echoed, are put in place under the assumption that students cannot be available for academic learning and using their phones at the same time. They represent one of many possible perspectives on student technology use and learning made manifest in the explicit articulation of said rule, the expectation that teachers enforce it, and the various modes that enforcement takes. In terms of site-specific art, the rule as well as the way that

educators and students relate to it are a site for potential engagement (taking into account location, social conditions, and interpretive frames) that Finn took up by pondering alternative ways to respond. Rather than punishing students or enforcing the rule more strictly in her own classroom, Finn wondered about the potential for creating an assignment that would require students to look at their phones in other classes and to reflect on their experiences of being asked to break rules on somebody else's terms. Intrigued by this suggestion and how Finn was asking her students to engage institutional expectations at the nexus of their own experiences and actions, I initiated several conversations with my own high school students about whether and how their use of phones contributes to their own learning. After a few lively discussions, I asked them each to author a cell phone policy by which they thought the entire class should abide. For the sake of the exercise, I asked them to put themselves in a position of power and institutional authority. Their suggestions included:

- Students should choose if they want to listen or not. If another student is distracted by someone else on their cell phone, they should point it out and ask for change.
- Students should never use cell phones during class because it is disrespectful to the teacher.
- When spotted using their cell phone in an unproductive way during class, the student using their phone should have a chance to explain themselves. Students should have a certain number of strikes before the rest of the class bans them from using their phone.

- Students should be able to always use their phones but never call someone in the middle of class.
- Students should only use phones for academic purposes. Students should understand that if they use phones for other purposes, they are breaking group expectations and implying that they think what they are doing is more important than what the rest of the group is doing.

As my students' suggestions demonstrate, occupying a position of authority over the experience of others resulted in perspectives that amplified, replicated, refracted, and rejected the institutional status quo. Their policies also reflected understandings of presence that were both immeasurable and fraught. Regarding the use of cell phones alone, my students articulated many understandings of what it means to be present as a part of a learning community, as well as why doing so is important. For some, phone use seems to be a way to become less present with the class, and as such, they understand phone use as disrespectful to each other. Perhaps because of internalized messages prioritizing conformity within formal education, and/or perhaps because they genuinely feel less connected to students who are using their phones, my students seemed to believe that their actions serve as indicators for how present they are with each other, and that each others' presence is a valuable part of learning. Other students seemed to frame phone use as a way to become more present with the class — e.g. using phones for “academic purposes.” Still other students assumed that attention should be optional, and as such, a student's presence can shift throughout the course of any given class as decided by themselves.

I did not ultimately ask my students to decide on any given policy, but rather to consider the assumptions within each one, such as whether cell phones are necessarily non-academic, or whether students should have the power to police one another's actions. As inspired by Finn's imagined assignment, my hope in facilitating this discussion was similar to the kinds of learning that become possible through engaging pedagogy and curriculum as creative processes -- that can help students consider their own understandings of presence both for themselves, and also in relation to each other and the context of schooling. I chose not to immediately hand them a conclusion or to decide on an actual policy because I wanted us all to dwell in how complex and messy questions of both presence and institutional power can be. After all, deciding that students should have the power to inflict "strikes" upon each other, that they should have to demonstrate involvement by never using their phones, or that they should be able to disregard requests by their peers to participate in particular ways all reflect a concern for what it means to be present with one another. That presence is not as simply measured as the existence or absence of a phone or a set rule about them is a conundrum that my students seemed to grapple with in their attempts to make guidelines for student conduct more definable. A hunch that I carry throughout this project is that presence is a concept that is underutilized in helping both students and educators to understand their own capacities and to take creative risks with relating to their sociopolitical contexts. To continually return to the questions of what is here, how does one's self relate, and how does one know can not only open up questions of perception and understanding, but also foster the

birth of new ways of addressing and intervening in forms of presence that perpetuate pain and inequity.

Research Questions

As an endeavor in considering more equitable modes of being, it is important to provide students and educators with ways to both understand their lives in relation to frameworks that critique injustices, and also to pursue frameworks and methods that can help people to test the limits of these injustices — to find gaps in oppressive ideologies, and to realize the potential for more compassionate ways of being. In many ways, the work of anti-oppressive pedagogy is this: to provide people with ways of becoming more aware of injustice, and to give them a framework through which they might pursue change. There are many schools of thought through which people have been and continue to take up these endeavors: feminism, anti-racism, and queer theory, to name a few. The inquiry that I explore in this project is an extension of these frameworks. Specifically, I consider the following questions:

- What insights can creative processes lend to anti-oppressive curriculum and pedagogy?
- What pedagogical methods and curricular arrangements can educators pursue in order to help their students explore the role of oppression within their own experiences and the world around them?
- What insights might the work of contemporary artists who address oppression be able to lend to teachers and students who are also attempting to cultivate anti-oppressive praxis?

Methods

My conceptual analysis for considering creative manifestations of anti-oppressive inquiry comes from frameworks offered by Adrian Piper and Jacques Derrida, two thinkers who explore the idea of presence in very different ways. Since my interest in helping educators and students to explore experimental and creative curricula hinges on the idea of them cultivating more specific understandings of their own experiences within and in relation to larger systems, I explore the frameworks that Piper and Derrida offer in the interest of considering varying perspectives on presence. Piper's (1989/1996a, 1992/1996a, 1993) idea of the indexical present provides a means by which to consider interpersonal dynamics as both specific and malleable. In this framework, Piper invests in the idea of exactness, and claims that it is possible to pinpoint broad oppressions as they manifest in specific moments and relationships; in doing so, she highlights the ways in which the quality of precision can lend itself to transformation of injustice. Derrida's (1976) idea of trace involves a very different understanding of presence. Through it, Derrida describes the impossibility for any interpretation or expression to be definitive. He suggests that efforts and artifacts of expression remain continually fraught with the potential to produce new and unanticipated meanings, as well as to be haunted by past ones. In this way, Derrida's understanding of presence is as slippery and indefinite, yet often troubled by efforts to reduce and simplify. Though they differ considerably, I do not understand Piper's and Derrida's frameworks to be diametrically opposed, but rather, as providing ways to consider vastly different approaches to presence, and hopefully as illuminating diverse means by which to negotiate injustice. My desire is that exploring

the two alongside one another allows for some productive tensions to arise, and also resists reifying either approach as automatically superior.

In exploring how these concepts can play out in lived pedagogy, I facilitated conversations with Finn and Sara to help explore the ways in which the methods I saw in particular artworks could inform curriculum in contexts of formal education. Through explicating these conversations, I illuminate the various benefits, pitfalls, and complexities involved in incorporating creative assignments into anti-oppressive education. Gude's (2012) description of the spiral curriculum is similar to the methods I used to pursue inquiry within this project. The idea of the spiral demonstrates the ways in which I dwelled upon and repeatedly returned to particular themes — an approach which Trinh (2013), Freedman (2003), and Grant, et al. (2008) emphasize can help to consider complexities within relationships without the need to ascribe absolute meaning. In focusing on the idea of presence, I came to Piper and Derrida as a means of considering two approaches to the question of presence. I used their frameworks to spiral through the works of contemporary artists who I thought were doing intriguing work around the idea of presence, and from whose praxes I imagined it might be possible to borrow in developing experimental approaches to curriculum and pedagogy. At the same time, I incorporated conversations with educators Sara and Finn as another layer within these spirals. Along with them, I discussed the relationship between understanding presence, utilizing experimental and creative frameworks, and cultivating anti-oppressive inquiry within various educational contexts.

Gude (2012) describes how “much of significant contemporary art is not the result of an investigation by an individual artist who reaches for an endpoint or conclusion, but rather it is the practice of creating frames for participatory investigation, enabling experiences that are deeply engaged and deeply reflective” (p. 78). Just as Gude emphasizes research and inquiry as endeavors that can occur with others, I pursued the research for this project in conversation with Sara and Finn, educators whose pedagogies I knew and trusted were also aligned with anti-oppressive philosophies and valuing creative methods. My understanding of Sara and Finn within this process were as co-investigators, albeit with different roles than mine. Their objective was not to produce a dissertation-length study, and so I took the responsibility for scheduling, organizing, and transcribing our conversations. At the same time, we entered into and continued our discussions with the understanding that our conversations were in the interest of mutual inquiry and could be beneficial for each of us as opportunities to further our own understandings of the role of creativity in anti-oppressive pedagogy. In other words, my intention was to learn with and from them, not as an objective researcher, but as a fellow educator with questions and concerns similar to their own.

Chapter Overview

Throughout this project, my goal has been to consider the ways in which approaches present within particular artworks can function as inspiration for pedagogy and curricular organization. I explored multiple frameworks that involve a commitment to approaching issues of oppression, yet also demonstrate distinct understandings of presence. Coupled with this exploration is a consideration of how analysis informed by

these approaches can play out within lived pedagogy. Ultimately, my goal is to provide a framework for educators and students who are interested in considering anti-oppressive ideas and questions to experiment with a wider variety of methods in their analytical work, to become more aware of the options available to them, and to develop a clearer understanding about their methods of choice.

In chapter two, I synthesize the main themes that emerged during my conversations with educators Sara and Finn about the potential to invite students to explore the concepts of presence in relation to anti-oppressive frameworks. Highlighting four themes that arose during our series of conversations, I describe how the elements of observation, experimentation, trust, and dis/comfort play a role in anti-oppressive pedagogy. I include descriptions offered by Sara, Finn, and/or myself about how educators and students can approach each of these elements intentionally so as to open up new possibilities for engaging with ideas about power, resistance, and injustice.

So as to gain specificity regarding the ways in which creative processes can lend themselves to observing, experimenting, and negotiating the discomfort that Sara, Finn, and I describe as a part of critical pedagogical endeavors, I explore two approaches to understanding and creating art that addresses oppression. For the first one in chapter three, *The Curricular Potential of the Indexical Present*, I use Adrian Piper's (1989/1996a, 1992/1996a, 1993) idea of the indexical present to explore an analytical approach through which artists can draw attention to and critique dynamics of the present. Piper describes the indexical present as a mode through which to draw attention to the specific ways in which broad, institutional oppressions reproduce themselves

within intimate interpersonal dynamics. Within her own work, she uses strategies such as direct interpersonal address and mimicry to invite viewers into a dynamic in which they can reflect specifically on how their own ideas and actions relate to oppressive dynamics. From her framework, I drew the themes of intimacy, immediacy, confrontation, and catalysis, the lattermost of which Piper describes as a force that elicits a change within people who have been exposed to it. She describes catalysis as enabling change at a level that is not always congruent with peoples' awareness. In other words, she intends for her works to create a change in her viewers even if they are not aware of wanting or needing to change their ideas or behavior.

I used Piper's idea of the indexical present as a conceptual framework for considering the ways in which several other artists have approached their work. Namely, I discuss the works of Mierle Laderman Ukeles (1973-76), Regina José Galindo (2003), Emma Sulkowicz (2014-15), and Gran Fury (1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1989a, 1989b) in terms of the ways they each utilize elements of Piper's indexical present. To be clear, this analytical move is not an interpretation of their intentions, but rather, a way I am suggesting it is possible to read their work in order to glean approaches for curricular interventions. Putting their works and Piper's framework into conversation, I suggest that elements that Piper prioritizes in her approach are also evident in the work of these other artists, and that considering them together can demonstrate a range of approaches to a similar concept or problem. For example, the concept of intimacy appears as an element in both public contexts and personal proximity in the works of several of the artists I consider within this chapter. In works such as Sulkowicz's (2014-15) *Mattress*

Performance: Carry that Weight, Gran Fury's (1989) *Kissing Doesn't Kill*, and Regina José Galindo's (2003) *¿Quién Puede Borrar las Huellas? (Who Can Erase the Traces?)*, each artist demonstrates possibilities for framing and creating works that highlight oppression via the idea of intimacy. I focus on both their methods and contexts in order to consider their processes as forms of pedagogy involving conceptualizing and executing their work, as well as considering what both they and their audiences may have to learn from participating in and/or viewing the works.

In chapter four, I explore a second set of directives in the interest of gaining a different sense of creative approaches than those I described in relation to the indexical present. To do so, I discuss Jacques Derrida's idea of the "trace" as a framework for considering the roles of inscription, erasure, and play. Using his theories to consider the relationship between ideas, expressions, and interpretations, I develop sub-themes that double as curricular suggestions for ways in which educators and students might experiment with their perspectives and understandings of the world around them. As with the prompts I provided in the third chapter, the sub-themes function as an imaginary of both how artists deploy particular processes in the interest of unsettling oppressive beliefs and practices as well as a set of suggestions for how students and educators might pursue their own processes of inquiry. In this chapter, I consider works by artists Tatyana Fazlalizadeh (2012-13), Marlene NourbeSe Philip (2008), Ana Mendieta (1973a, 1973b, 1973-78), and Emma Sulkowicz (2014-15). Like in my third chapter, I explain how examining their works through the concept of the trace can function as a way to regard them as windows into creative curriculum; by considering the ways in which they relate

to and execute the idea of trace within their works, I consider how their methods and processes can offer possibilities and suggestions to students and educators who are interested in experimenting with and asking questions about the world around them and how it is constructed.

In my fifth and final chapter, I offer suggestions for students and educators who are interested in pursuing creative, process-oriented approaches to exploring anti-oppressive frameworks. In synthesizing my observations about the role that art can play in helping to explore pedagogy as process, I consider the value that this kind of approach can have in realizing pedagogy as a practice in resisting and critiquing oppression. I also examine two online projects — *Beautiful Trouble* and *Rookie* — as examples of what extensions of this framework can involve. Ultimately, I consider Springgay and Irwin's (2004) suggestion that "As artists and scholars, we must move away from universal knowing which is fixed and certain and instead allow for new ways of seeing and feeling that illuminate and reveal" in the context of approaches to pedagogy and curriculum (p. 81). In doing so, I suggest frameworks for developing a more complex sense of contexts, capacities, and options for learning that I hope will be useful to educators and students looking for ways to explore anti-oppressive inquiry in their own lives and the lives of those around them.

CHAPTER II

PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES

In this chapter, I explore the foundations of anti-oppressive approaches to education and the role that creative processes can play in facilitating critical inquiry about systemic oppression.. In order to assess how approaches to anti-oppressive education can dovetail with creative, process-oriented pedagogy and curriculum, I facilitated a series of conversations between myself and Sara and Finn, two other teachers who I sought out because I knew they each had an interest in considering creative work and anti-oppressive education in relation to one another. In addition to discussing foundational approaches and elements within anti-oppressive education, I spoke with Sara and Finn about their experiences with and reasons for infusing creative approaches into their teaching. We also spoke about each of the artworks that I chose to analyze in chapters three and four of this project in terms of their potential relationships to curriculum and pedagogy.

Background

I initially met Finn and Sara, the educators I invited into conversation for this study, at an academic summer program where we all taught for several years. Finn taught Spanish, Sara taught Art, and I instructed classes in critical thinking and contemporary theory. The program, which is publicly funded as an educational extension for high

school students labeled gifted and talented, offers five and a half weeks of intensive courses in which students specialize in a particular discipline while also taking courses that encourage interdisciplinary connections and the cultivation of reflexivity. Faculty within the program often work closely together to develop curriculum specific to and across their disciplines, as well as extra-curricular programming that takes place during evenings and weekends. Prior to the discussions we had for this study, Finn, Sara, and I had worked together somewhat informally at this school by exchanging ideas about pedagogy and supporting each other's programming efforts. Because of these shared experiences within this particular teaching environment, I developed collegial friendships with both Finn and Sara, and made it a point to talk with each of them about pedagogy during the regular school year as well. Each of our educational contexts shifted during the regular academic calendar to involve an array of teaching and learning in both secondary and higher education. While Sara pursued her own education in Arts Education and then later in Fine Arts, she also worked with a range of students and educators, serving as an arts educator and a mentor for teaching artists who facilitate arts integration in schools. Finn worked full-time as a Spanish instructor in a public high school, and I taught Women's Studies and Educational Studies at the college level, as well as English at an independent high school.

For the purpose of this study, I proposed a series of four synchronous conversations to take place over the span of a few months in which Finn, Sara, and I met using the video chat function on Google Hangouts to talk about our ideas about creativity and anti-oppressive approaches to curriculum and pedagogy. Finn and Sara were both

excited to accept my invitation. I structured and led each conversation, but also made space for Finn and Sara to pose questions to the group, each other, and/or me. Each conversation lasted for an hour and a half and took place three to four weeks apart. In order to allow them time to consider their own ideas prior to our discussions, I emailed the questions I used to frame each conversation several weeks in advance. Following each conversation, I also sent a description of the main themes that came up during our discussion to allow for further reflection. For the second and third conversations, I also sent links to and a brief description of the artworks that I discussed in previous chapters to Finn and Sara, since I wanted to discuss these pieces as potential sources of pedagogical inspiration with the rest of the group. I recorded each conversation for audio, and transcribed them afterwards for coding purposes.

I began each conversation after the first one by reviewing the main themes I had identified from our previous discussion and facilitating dialogue about how those themes had resonated with the group in the weeks since our previous meeting. After transcribing the interviews, I looked for the ideas that seemed to pop up with the most frequency, and that also seemed to have a particularly generative role for conversation. While transcribing, I noted how particular concepts emerged during our discussions that pivoted the dialogue and became a focal point for us all to consider. Both interest and excitement arose around these ideas, and they seemed fertile for considering each of our own thoughts on the creative dimensions of anti-oppressive pedagogy. These concepts functioned as both pivots and doorways — they had the momentum of both shifting discussion and opening concepts for further consideration. We often returned to these

pivots concepts in subsequent discussions, sometimes at my prompting in the initial reflections on previous themes, and sometimes organically throughout our time together. In this way, the primary themes of observation, experimentation, trust, and dis/comfort emerged as significant threads within creative approaches to anti-oppressive education. While we revisited these ideas within each of our group discussions, we also each named them as important elements that we would each like to continue to consider beyond the scope of our conversations together.

Observation

A recurring theme that came up in my conversations with Finn and Sara was the importance of helping students to develop an observational practice — a practice through which they can become more attuned to the world around them, including the ways in which they interact with sociopolitical processes and also might potentially be empowered to strategically navigate those processes. Within the observational practices that we discussed, students can learn to notice events and patterns more critically, to register their own significance within broader contexts, and to consider their own relationships to what they observe. Scholarship in critical pedagogy (Carr, 2008) and critical literacy (Luke, 2012) affirms that developing an active, flexible practice of attentiveness to social patterns is an important component of anti-oppressive education. Power and oppression can seem like abstractions to students and educators unaccustomed to engaging the world with a critical lens -- privilege can shield people from awareness of inequity, and injustice can sometimes seem too big to address for people who experience it. As Schwalbe (2008) explains, becoming attentive to the role that people play in

reproducing and resisting patterns of injustice is key, since "Human interaction underlies every pattern, and we must be mindful of this action if we hope to explain the pattern" (p. 128).

The idea of observation first emerged during my initial discussion with Finn and Sara in response to a question I asked them about how they related their work as educators to facilitating an understanding of oppression. Sara responded that she found it important to provide students with frameworks through which they can better understand their own lives in relation to the world around them, and that one way to do this is to help them foster an observational practice. She named this specific element of observation as the underlying goal of an exercise she has done with her students on the first day of class that she describes as "a practice in getting lost." With the help of other faculty members, she takes each student to a different space on campus and instructs them to sit, take in their new environment, and to notice "the magic of what it feels like when you don't yet know a space or what your body is doing in it." She asks students to simply observe for several minutes, then to take out their sketchbooks and to document what they observe in some way. After they have documented for at least ten minutes, they can then begin to find their way back to the classroom, where they will then generate a "haphazard, dysfunctional map" of the campus, including both features of the school ground as well as where each student was in relation to one another. After giving these instructions, Sara leaves her students by themselves to observe. Sara explained that through this exercise, she wants to emphasize that "being present and being aware is so important." Acknowledging that this exercise runs the risk of being similar to a form of hazing or

pranking in which the power of the teacher to get the student lost is the main emphasis, she explained that she has tried to be as explicit as possible in outlining the exercise that she intends to orchestrate an experience for students in which they have opportunities to be reflective and observant. In other words, she tries to emphasize their experiences, rather than her power; at the same time, she acknowledges that the potential for the exercise to be read as a “trick” or “prank” by students is always present. Regardless, by starting the class in this way, Sara explained that she hopes to set the tone for students to cultivate an observational practice that they can continue to develop throughout the course. The way she sets up this introductory activity to both center students' experiences and encourage them to take note of the ways in which they already engage with the world lays the foundation for education that is both anti-oppressive and process-oriented. As Gude (2012) explains, “Much significant contemporary art is not the result of an investigation by an individual artist who reaches for an endpoint or conclusion, but rather it is the practice of creating frames for participatory investigation, enabling experiences that are deeply engaged and deeply reflective” (p. 78). In beginning her course with an emphasis on observation, Sara sets the tone for her students to value and deepen the ways they ask questions and create knowledge from their own perspectives. She mentioned that she often revisits this framework in leading up to the final project, in which Sara explained that the ultimate question she uses to frame student research is “What are you noticing? What are you looking at?”

Awareness of Self and Surroundings

In order to help her students to cultivate a continually observational practice, Sara explained how she has assigned projects that she hopes will guide students to become more aware of themselves and their surroundings. She mentioned one such project in which she has assigned her art students to carry objects that she provides with them for a full day. During that time, she instructed students to sketch those objects every few hours. The objects include common household items, such as a bottle of dish soap, a roll of toilet paper, and a loofa. Sara explained that a goal of this assignment is to foster students's capacity to pause and reflect upon the relationship between objects and ideas. Considering how many objects pass through people's perception on any given day, she pointed out that part of cultivating a creative practice involves developing habits of thinking about how and why particular ideas and objects become more prevalent in consciousness, as well as what interventions are possible in using any material creatively.

Sara described this assignment as an opportunity for students to “actually get to know the material” and to investigate the relationship of their object to its surrounding context. By explicitly using everyday items for creative purposes, Sara hoped to encourage students to think more broadly about what subjects and materials are regularly at their disposal for use within artistic practice. Her approach echoes an emphasis within critical literacy scholarship on studying texts both broadly and experimentally, since doing so can open up more opportunities to relate literacy practices to personal lives and experiences (Janks, 2014b). In other words, expanding awareness around what kinds of elements or ephemera can become a part of educational praxis not only provides fresh

ways for students to become reflexive, but also can help to unsettle uninterrogated assumptions about the world. Such practices can help educators and students to consider Gramsci's (1999) suggestion that since people exist in a dynamic relationship with the world around them and always have the capacity to learn from that world, that education is and can be everywhere (p. 140-41).

Finn was so enlivened to hear Sara describe this process that she started brainstorming how she could adapt this project within her public school context. She imagined that if she similarly directed her students to observe something every hour and to record regular observations, her students might get pushback from other teachers for not doing work directly related to the class at hand. She remarked, "It's interesting to think about because... [students are] very much multitasking [already]" by doing things like checking their phones or doing other homework, even despite rules that request their specific focus to the task that the teacher has selected for the day. She pondered that inviting students to become more aware of their own actions, regardless of whether those actions constitute challenges to existing rules, could potentially give them a greater sense of empowerment and agency regarding their own experiences. Finn's hypothetical invitation for her students to learn from their own actions that unfold within and perhaps against institutional restrictions overlaps with practices of relational art, which Bourriaud (2002) describes as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than independent and private space" (p. 113). By asking her students to use their own actions as a site for learning, Finn would not only invite her students to become more mindful

about how they experience education, but also emphasize the importance of observation in noting the relationship between individuals and institutions.

This dynamic of students' observation of self in relation to surrounding contexts is present in Johnson and Vasudevan's (2014) study, which considers both school dress codes and students' own relationships to clothing as texts that students navigate via their own affective and embodied responses. In this case, reading fashion as a text allows Johnson and Vasudevan to consider the ways in which students "read" critically vis-à-vis their own embodiments. What Sara refers to as awareness and observation Johnson and Vasudevan call critical literacy, claiming:

Practices that might count (or be recognized) as critical literacy include speaking, dressing, or gesturing to express particular ways of being that belie, subvert, and expose social norms and power imbalances. Such performances are critical because they allow youth to explore and expose ways power circulates. In this sense, power is not a static force or entity to be exchanged, but rather is made and remade through interactions and people's recognition of, and reactions to, one another. (p. 100)

While Johnson and Vasudevan refer to practices that students adopt of their own volition, Finn, Sara, and I explored the ways in which teachers can explicitly facilitate curricular experiences in which students have opportunities to learn from their own observations, and to value awareness itself as a useful skill.

In listening to Finn's brainstorm, I responded that the structure of a traditional school day is often not set up to facilitate extended thoughtfulness; rather, subjects can seem conceptually compartmentalized and separate from students' own experiences. I remarked that if the structure of the school day doesn't necessarily encourage students to

be mindful of their own relationships to surrounding environments or to make connections between subjects, but instead prioritizes compartmentalized thinking and answers that are framed as inherently external to students, then it is little wonder that students sometimes struggle with more open-ended prompts that ask them to reflect on their own experiences and to make connections to what they are noticing and learning. I shared that I have frequently witnessed these struggles during my own classes, when students often reply with confusion to open-ended prompts, claiming that they are unsure of how to proceed with the assignment because they are not sure of what I, the teacher, wants.

In our discussions about how to help students to cultivate observational practices, Finn, Sara, and I spoke about the ways in which coming to be aware of oneself as a knower and a maker can be a crucial part in a students' understanding of their surroundings and the ways in which they can potentially navigate the politics of those surroundings. Approaching assignments creatively, or inviting students into observational practice through creative means, is one way that all three of us conceived of enabling a greater sense of awareness with and for students. As Villaverde (1998) explains, "Through art and critical pedagogy, youth [can] interpret comprehension as a process, a methodology, that we experience and enact in perception, internalization, and expression of information" (p. 203). In gaining a heightened awareness for the process of their learning, student may be more likely to manipulate elements of their own learning as well as their educational environment purposefully and with critical intent. In doing so, education can become less of an exercise in producing ideas with the narrow parameters

of what any given teacher "wants" and more about what Trinh (2013) explains as learning how to "be aware, without closing off, of where and from where one speaks, or else of how, when, and by whom one can be heard." (p. 73) Trinh elaborates that this praxis marks "an ability to advance in the dark, a way of opening the field of possibilities in creativity, as well as a necessity to work with multiplicity in relations of power" (p. 73).

Postmodern Curriculum

Cultivating both creative practice and vocabularies with and through which to understand processes of perception opens up a range of possibilities for students to regard the world with exploratory criticality. With the capacity to theorize how ideas and practices come into being, students can learn that social processes are malleable, rather than fixed and innate — a process that Freedman (2003) associates with postmodern curriculum, or curriculum that is both fluid and self-aware (p. 108 - 109). Furthermore, with a greater appreciation for the ways in which both learning (broadly conceived) and schooling (within educational institutions) involve operations of inclusion and omission, students can come to appreciate the ways in which they have the capacity to intervene in, subvert, and/or play with these politics.

Finn described that she has had some success with challenging compartmentalization and expanding student conversations beyond the formal classroom setting through her creation of a school-oriented Instagram account. She explained, "I'm trying to experiment with that crossover between [the students's] work and what they do on their phone... I [had] created an Instagram because it was Senior Assembly Day... and [after that] I began documenting student projects."



Figure 2. Micro Casas Project Construction

Figure 2 shows students working on a month-long “Micro Casas” project in which they worked in groups to construct houses according to parameters that Finn set. As a way to practice Spanish conversation, groups were responsible for designing a house, providing a structural explanation for it, writing a short story about the house’s inhabitant, and presenting their house to the class as its official architects. Finn explained that during the process of constructing these projects:

A lot of the kids [began to] follow me [on Instagram] because I’ve made it so that they could — you know, it’s a school-based thing... so they’re seeing what their classmates are doing and interacting with it... they’ll say, I saw the picture of the whale house on Insta and I was talking to one of the group members about it.

Finn was enlivened to hear students discussing their own work outside of class, not as a result of a mandate from her, but out of a genuine interest in each other's ideas. She described this approach as having the potential to widen students' understanding of both what school and social media can be, as well as what overlap can exist between the two. In becoming invested in each other's work, students can begin to shift away from an individualistic and hierarchical version of learning in which the teacher is centered and students remain at the periphery. They can also become better versed in critical pedagogical practices that politicize students to become more aware of the political contexts of schools as well as their own agency in addressing problems (Beck, 2005, p. 395).

In providing a way for students to converse with each other about their work, Finn explained her hopes that students might learn to consider their peers as legitimate sources of knowledge. She said, "I would like my students to get a lot out of reactions from their peers [about] what they're doing" and to consider "What are they learning from that? How are they growing from that? How is that [feedback] changing their thoughts on this assignment and what they're getting from it?" By considering the ideas and work of their peers as valid sources of knowledge, students navigating the context that Finn described have the potential to become more aware of not only their own work and relationship to creative processes, but also more curious about the work of others and how their processes might differ. Developing this kind of attentiveness about other students in addition to themselves not only combats the competitive individualism that standardized,

test-oriented education can foster; it also enables students to experience education as a dynamic, active process.

In considering how to retain a critical edge within pedagogies that explore creative processes, Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) observes how the presence of positivism within arts pedagogy can flatten the complexity involved in the creative process and undercut the possibilities it offers. In order to avoid this conundrum, it may be helpful to put the basic tenets of critical literacy (e.g. interrogating power, encouraging democratic practice, and seeking multiple perspectives) into conversation with the practice of pedagogy explored and enacted through the arts. In doing so, creative and critical processes remain in conversation with one another, and can hopefully adapt to the questions that students and educators are pursuing, rather than becoming reified as always looking a particular way or achieving a particular outcome.

Extended Reflection

Finn, Sara, and I all agreed that the development of observation is itself a process that involves repeated practice over an extended period of time, and that teachers can facilitate this practice in many ways. As an example of how to intentionally structure inquiry that provides opportunities for students to become observant, Finn explained that when she starts a new topic with a class, she initially frames questions broadly, then narrows their scope, and eventually moves back out to broad questions. For example, after reading a new text with students, she might ask them, “What do you see?”, then delve into their observations, prompt them to relate these ideas to themselves, and then expand the discussion to include connections to their communities. Sara echoed this

strategy as one that she introduces in professional development with teachers as the “DAR framework” or a process through which educators can invite students to “describe, analyze, and relate” what they observe to what they already know. Through exploring their own observations over an extended period of time, Finn, Sara, and I discussed how students can not only come to know the world around them more clearly, but can also become more aware of their own modes of perception.

Springgay (PSU Art & Social Practice, 2012) also emphasizes that educational processes are especially meaningful when students engage in cycles of reflection, analysis, and action that continue over an extended period of time. In addition to serving as a valuable mode through which to gain both personal and social insight, cultivating extended observation is in keeping with the principles of critical pedagogy and its emphasis on transformation (hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2000; Nagar & Swarr, 2010). As Finn, Sara, and I discussed, it is helpful to consider the cultivation of this awareness throughout curriculum design and facilitation, rather than as limited to just one activity, class, or semester.

In helping students to cultivate observation, we agreed that it is important to encourage reflective practices such as journaling or sketching, and that for some of these practices, it is important for students to have spaces that are exclusively their own and that they intend for neither their teacher nor their peers to see. This stance marks what I am describing as “observation” as distinct from surveillance, in which a directive for a teacher to always have access to a students’ thoughts and expressions functions as an expression of power.

Teachers as Observers

In the spirit of critical pedagogy as a transformative endeavor, the observational practice we described is not limited to students, but rather, can be helpful for teachers to cultivate as well. As Carr (2008) notes, it is particularly important for educators to remain open to new insights about the process of learning, because “we should be wary of believing that we have all the knowledge and, importantly, experience we require to understand how students experience their educational journey” (p. 83). Finn, Sara, and I discussed how an observational practice has helped each of us to be better attuned to navigating unplanned moments that occur in teaching that, with some finesse, can serve as conduits for interrogating power. When I initially asked Finn and Sara, “How do you consider your teaching in relation to helping students understand oppression?”, they both described how being attentive to and negotiating “teachable moments” has been particularly useful to them in exploring issues of oppression with their students. Finn described how oppression is “always on [my] radar but not necessarily a main focus of everyday” and explained that anti-oppressive frameworks converge more explicitly with her teaching when “I’ll all of a sudden be presented with teachable moment.” Finn explained one such moment in the context of her high school Spanish class when a black student had changed their hairstyle from cornrows to an afro and white students in the class asked to touch that student’s hair. Since Finn’s understanding of curriculum included the implicit and null as well as the explicit (Eisner, 1985), she saw this moment as a necessary opportunity for raising awareness about the power dynamics present in white people touching the hair of black people. Rather than ignoring, transposing, or

marginalizing the social dynamics that emerged in her classroom (Brooks & Thompson, 2005), she observed that curriculum for the discussion of racialized power was already present, and chose to engage it by dialoguing with her students.

Sara echoed the importance of recognizing and seizing on these moments in “casual” contexts, such as during class changes when students are leaving or entering “formal” learning spaces. She spoke about a specific example that transpired when she was working the academic summer program where she, Finn and I met. During this particular session, there was a campus-wide conversation underway about racist comments that several students had made in the company of others. Students had brought their concerns about these comments to teachers, who had then called an all-school assembly. As a continuation of the conversation that began in the assembly, Sara chose to use a few moments before the official “start” of her art class to initiate a conversation about experiences with racism. One approach she used was “to talk about how silence [had] affected my own life — I would have loved to have had an ally during times where I felt I was the only person being insulted of being affected and felt too alone — the silence of no one else looking uncomfortable or speaking up made me feel really attacked.” In citing her own experiences of hearing and responding to racist remarks as a Latina woman, she explained that she hoped to open a door for students to consider how they might themselves engage productively and proactively in anti-racist praxis. This strategy is made possible by her own observations of her personal experiences as well as her awareness of her relationship with her students and what she sensed would be a

helpful mode to employ when asking them to consider their own relationships to communicates in which racism exists.

Sara and Finn both described how cultivating their own observational habits helped them to envision and practice thoughtful, responsive, and empathetic approaches to how oppression occurs in the fabric of everyday life for both themselves and their students. Finn's sensitivity to the power dynamics involved in white students touching black students' hair is made possible by the development of her own criticality around addressing racism as a white teacher. Her knowledge of both the historical dynamics present in this moment, as well as her sensitivity to the relationship between her white students and her students of color involves active observation of complex circumstances that unfold in the everyday goings-on of her classroom. As both she and Sara sensed how to respond to these moments, they balanced what they observed with their own sense of what might constitute effective methods for inviting their students into their own critical reflections about their surrounding political contexts.

hooks (1994) refers to the balance that Finn and Sara describe as holistic and participatory education, citing Freire's (1970) insistence on education as a process that has the power to address systemic injustices, including those that occur in the name of education itself. Finn and Sara both emphasized the idea that students come to be more empowered to consider and respond to incidents and structures of oppression when they better understand their own lives. Scholarship in the areas of critical literacy and critical pedagogical practices also emphasizes the process of dialogue, interrogating the role of

power in the classroom, and questioning what counts as legitimate knowledge (Bourke, 2008; Luke, 2012; Wolk, 2003).

Observation as Anti-Oppression Praxis

In linking the cultivation of an observational practice to anti-oppressive projects and a sensibility of social justice, Finn shared her observations that her white high school students are often both passionate about and blind to issues of racism, particularly as they apply to their own lives. She explained that they often “don’t see any problems of racism in the school” and “they don’t see anything that’s not completely overt.” For example, she described how many of her students became outraged over an image that circulated on social media of students at a neighboring school posing with Confederate flags and making overtly racist comments. Though the students expressed anger about these images, Finn remarked that it seemed more difficult for them to be aware of forms of oppression that might not have seem as blatant to them, even though they are present as patterns in their everyday lives, such as the disproportionate number of white students to students of color in “higher level” classes, such as those marketed as “Advanced Placement.” In other words, students’ observations of injustice seemed to be limited to a particular register of “blatant” oppression that was somewhat removed from their own lives.

Sara elaborated on the barriers that can exist for students in understanding how they are implicated in oppressive structures. She noted:

So often, if we're talking about oppression, [students] can say, oh yeah, that is really messed up, but I'm totally not a part of it — I'm not implicated because I haven't done anything heinous — I don't do that and I don't act that way. So there's this separation between acknowledging but not necessarily saying that you're part of that system.

She linked this disconnect to the example of the aftermath of the school-wide assembly about racist comments noted above. In her conversations with students following this assembly, she spoke about their role in both observing and responding to expressions of racism. She told her students:

If you're not the one saying anything racist, you're still in a community where that's happening, and if you're saying you're a part of this community, you do have a voice to... say woah, that's not okay, and not just laugh it off, or say, 'I didn't say it and I'm not going to engage it.' There has to be a really active participation no matter what.

While Sara emphasized the component of action, underlying action is the importance of being able to notice expressions of oppression as well as one's personal capacity to respond to those expressions and to consider both possible responses and reasons to actualize them. In other words, in order for anyone to respond to injustice, it is necessary to first observe it, and to do so with an evolving awareness of one's own capacity for engagement and impact.

Wolk (2007) links the patterns that Finn and Sara describe to the ways in which current educational institutions are intended to create obedient workers rather than nurture creativity, imagination, a love for learning, and a widespread sense of social responsibility. As Finn explained, a challenge for educators that underscores the importance of developing critical frameworks vis-à-vis observational practices involves

“trying to help [privileged students] see not just overt instances of injustices but [to] look at some of the more insidious forms that they don’t pay attention to” such as the “horrible distribution of minority students in higher level classrooms and [how] that doesn’t resonate with a majority of white students... that there’s a system at work that pushes [white] students into those classes” while also keeping students of color out. Finn’s suggestion demonstrates the levels of nuance present in developing observational habits — that depending on their own relationship to oppression, students might be differently aware, and that emphasizing their own lives as worthwhile to notice can be a valuable part of becoming empowered to address injustice. Central questions that Finn’s anecdote demonstrates are: What makes oppression overt? What makes it possible for people to recognize some instances of oppression in their everyday lives but not others? Keeping these questions in mind, it is possible to see how cultivating observation involves not just an awareness of the world around oneself, but a sense of awareness itself, and how anyone makes meaning from what they observe.

Finn mentioned a few specific conversations that she had with students at the summer academic program about the importance of awareness as an ongoing project. In one incident, students gathered at a seminar about critical media literacy were giving Finn push-back about a claim she had made about people often policing each one another’s identities. In response to their denial of this claim, Finn asked, “I invite you to pay attention as you go about the rest of your day... and see what happens and how people are interacting with each other and the ways in which you’re getting told what’s appropriate and inappropriate.” Rather than giving them specific examples, Finn invited the resistant

students to notice these patterns for themselves, hence implicating modes of observation as foundational to understanding how injustice can emerge within social dynamics.

A similar conversation came up during Finn's summer Spanish class, when, after taking note of some gendered imbalances in speaking roles, Finn prompted her students, "I invite you to pay attention to who talks more, who raises their hand and who doesn't." She mentioned that in response, one of her male students later shared his observations that he had noticed that while many of the female students raised their hands and waited to be recognized before speaking, most of the male students simply spoke and expected for people to listen to them. Finn asked her student what he thought he could do about that, after which he decided to initiate a conversation with the class sharing his observations and brainstorming ways to make the expression of ideas more equitable. Upon hearing this anecdote, Sara agreed that she had also noticed asymmetrical speaking roles in previous classes, and that additionally, she had often observed that female students apologized for talking before they spoke. Employing a different strategy than Finn, Sara said that she often directly confronts students who do this, either asking them why they feel the need to apologize or outright telling them that they do not need to apologize before speaking.

I mentioned another strategy that I have used, which is to model my own observations to students in my classes so that they can think about the observation I am describing. For example, in discussions following screenings of Anna Deavere Smith's documentary theater project *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, I have said:

Something I have observed [during previous discussions of this film] is that usually a student will ask what Rodney King did [in order to deserve the violence he received at the hands of white police], and something else that I have noticed is that the student who asks that has always been white.

I then invite students into a discussion about what reasons might explain this pattern. In speaking from my vantage point of having observed several classes respond to the film, I can share observations with students and let them draw their own conclusions. Though the strategies Finn, Sara, and I describe differ from each another, they all attend to daily dynamics that can often go under-addressed, and they attempt to empower students to notice these dynamics and to act to change them.

Observation as Political

Underlying this commitment to cultivating an observational practice for and with both teachers and students is a sensibility that people's ideas and actions are always political, and that becoming more observant can help to navigate the politics in which people find themselves and understand others. As Carr (2008) explains, "Being political does not mean being a member of the Republicans or Democrats, or even participating in the electoral process, but rather it is associated with grasping the nature of power in our actions, our thinking and our societal conventions" (p. 90). Finn described attempting to cultivate this sensibility in discussing overtly political events such as Moral Mondays

with some of her students.² Reflecting on conversations her classes had had about Moral Monday events, Finn remarked:

The ones who haven't been exposed to it don't understand that your body does have an impact... they don't see that the act of getting together like that is important because you show A - that you're out there, B - see who else is fighting for the cause, you get to share ideas, have consciousness-raising events and workshops, and people in power do notice and it's the persistence aspect that is so important.

She cited these elements as being particularly valuable in dealing with and addressing social apathy and alienation, or the idea that “it’s always been that way” and “there’s nothing I can do about it.” In hearing her descriptions, I wondered if perhaps the students she spoke about were able to dismiss events such as Moral Mondays because they hadn’t yet cultivated an observational practice that would help them to ask, “What’s involved in one person making something that challenges something? What’s involved in getting a bunch of people together to come to Moral Mondays, because things happen there?” Anticipating the response that nothing actually happens at such events, I reflected, “I don’t know what it looks like when nothing happens... there are always so many things happening... so for [students] to say that nothing happens, I wonder what makes that [claim] possible?” The idea of becoming more, or perhaps differently attentive, then, involves developing a sensitivity to social processes, the roles that people play in them, and the potential employ various strategies to shift them intentionally. Developing an

² Moral Mondays refer to a series of protests that began in North Carolina in 2013 as a response to a series of legislative actions that attempted to restrict a range of rights, such as voting, access to reproductive health care, and education.

observational practice heightens the potential for a nuanced awareness to develop around both social processes themselves and also options for impacting or participating in them.

I used my own experiences of taking U.S. Government in high school to reflect on the need to better develop this kind of sensitivity. I described to Finn and Sara how, while completing the required guided chapter questions and defining the bolded words in my class textbook, I often felt that, as a class, we could have been having different kinds of conversations about the politics of our immediate situation. At the time, I didn't necessarily have a vocabulary for those politics, but I did remember feeling like we should be talking about them. I regularly wished for a practice that would help us to do so, such an assignment requiring students to "list every political thing in your immediate environment right now" because, as I explained to Finn and Sara, after having been introduced to a range of lenses (e.g. feminist, queer, and critical race theories) for interpreting sociopolitical happenings, I can see that so much is political. As I described to them:

It's everything! It's what you're talking about, what words you're using to say those things, what's in your textbooks, what people feel comfortable talking about or not, how [students and teachers] are using their bodies in this space, [and] where this curriculum even comes from. Why is it that we're only in classes with people of our own age, and what is up with this weird tracking? But there were none of these conversations! It was just like, 'Look at the bolded things', and 'What is the electoral college?'

In reflecting back on these hunches, it seems that many of them emerged from an investment in the importance of looking around and asking questions, as well as from a frustration with curriculum that often neglected to do so and opted instead for a more

detached approach to knowledge acquisition and production. Kumashiro (2000) describes that cultivating a more connected and critical sense of their surroundings involves providing students with opportunities to both address and ameliorate the sense of detachment that they often feel in schools. He explains:

Rather than aim for understanding of some critical perspective, anti-oppressive pedagogy should aim for effect by having students engage with relevant aspects of critical theory and extend its terms of analysis to their own lives, but then critique it for what it overlooks or for what it forecloses, what it says and makes possible as well as what it leaves unsaid and unthinkable. (p. 39)

As Kumashiro implies, for students to develop a sense of how the politics that surround them could change, it is helpful for them to have opportunities to understand themselves as political beings, and for that understanding to extend into a greater sense of agency and capacity for generating the transformations they see as necessary. As Brookfield (2005) explains, power involves “the ability to understand and take action in the world in a way that feels authentically grounded in critical reflection” (p. 49). Developing an observational practice can be a valuable component in an education in which both students and educators learn to consider how power impacts them as well as the power they have.

Experimentation

The idea of experimentation first came up during my second conversation with Finn and Sara when we were discussing practices through which to encourage students to become reflective and observant. In discussing various prompts through which to enable student reflection, experimentation emerged as a mode that can be valuable for both

teachers and students to employ as they try out different methods for gaining insight and understanding. While experimentation has many connotations (some of them inequitable and nefarious³) our discussions about experimentation referred to a willingness to break from existing norms and to test out new ideas without necessarily knowing the end product of an inquiry. As both a stance toward and an approach within educational practice, experimentation can validate diverse approaches to inquiry while also pushing back against pressures for learning to be narrowly standardized and standardizing. As Brookfield (2005) notes, the danger in the latter is that education can function as, “an ideological state apparatus [that] works to ensure the perpetuation of dominant ideology not so much by teaching values that support that ideology but more by immersing students in ideologically determined practices... which are perceived as universal, rational, and obvious but actually support certain segmented ways of understanding and ordering the world” (p. 75). Spring (2005) refers to this as a pattern of "ideological management" that has historically been linked to perpetuating and justifying racism, sexism, classism, and nationalism within U.S. schools.

In order to help students push back against these and other oppressive beliefs and practices instilled by and occurring within education, Sara, Finn and I discussed experimentation as a means by which students could make room for their own

³ Here I am referring both to experimental practices that involve subjecting a subject to harmful treatment and also to the use of said practices to produce knowledge about a group of people that supposedly justifies harmful treatment. The case of Saartje Baartman is a clear example. For more information, see the vast array of feminist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial scholarship that has discussed her life and treatment (Bloom, 2008; Fusco, 2003; Shohat, 1998; Wallace, 2010; Willinsky, 1998).

experiences and test out ideas that might run counter to those within the kinds of narrowly managed ideology Spring describes. The idea first emerged in our conversation about crafting open-ended prompts that provide students with the opportunity to make connections between course material and their own experiences. Finn remarked that when she assigns projects that students read as “creative”, they sometimes balk at the open-endedness of her prompt, claiming, “I’m not creative, what do you want me to do with this?” Despite this initial bewilderment, Finn observed that most students have ended up enjoying the work because they developed a greater sense of ownership about their ideas through the process.

Likewise, Sara related some examples of mentoring teaching artists who reported going into schools and getting pushback from teachers who didn’t want to shift their curriculum to work with visiting teaching artists. One teacher specifically rejected fostering collaboration by claiming, “I’ve just been doing this for a long time, so I know what I’m doing.” She remarked that this particular teacher seemed like he had a good rapport with his students and that the way that the collaboration was suggested might have felt like an imposition to him, or an insinuation that his teaching was insufficient. At the same time, while this inflexibility could have been a response to these circumstances, the unwillingness to explore curriculum with a new method has the potential to filter down to students, who might then experience a more rigid sense of teaching and learning. Sara remarked that perhaps if this teacher had himself generated the idea of collaborating with the teaching artist, the outcome could have been very different, and might have allowed for pedagogical experimentation that felt more equitable.

As an example, she described her observation of one teaching artist who worked with an ESL teacher to help facilitate the production of a stop-motion film about immigration and border control.⁴ The two were able to work together to facilitate a project in which their students were excited about using the materials available to them to connect to the existing curriculum. Sara described observing how engaged the students were during one of the video production days when they “were all on their iPads running around saying ‘Okay! We have to make a train somehow out of these desks!’” While the excitement of these particular students certainly does not prove that using video is a kind of magic curricular bullet, Sara did mention that it was a helpful reminder to her of the possibilities for engagement that can open up when teachers and students are willing to experiment with “projects that maybe feel like they don’t have as much of an end-goal or a rubric.” In this sense, experimentation emerged throughout our conversations as a means through which both teachers and students can try new things and test out ideas without the pressure of generating specific outcomes.

Finn, Sara, and I also agreed that a willingness to be experimental is valuable for educators to bear in mind as they craft relationships with students. In thinking about how to balance content, her own interests, and her students’ interests and needs, Sara commented, “I’m always having to check myself with how much my personal agenda may be overreaching, or good, or negative, or just not catering to what [my students] need at the time.” Sara’s description references a constant process that involves active

⁴ More information on this project is available at: <https://captainqs.wordpress.com/calarts-arts-integration-project/>

reflection on the part of the teacher as well as consistent attentiveness to students' experiences during their learning processes. Neuwirth (2003) describes this reflexive practice as a way in which educators can continue to teach themselves by retaining "a questioning spirit" (p. 284). As Sara describes, this willingness to remain attentive to and open to revising her teaching practice in relation to her students' needs is itself a form of experimentation. Approaching pedagogy with an emphasis on trying new things, and returning to previous ideas with alternative methods and questions can help students to not only to feel more engaged and humanized through the process of education, but can also clarify that navigating knowledge is not always as clear-cut as standardized approaches make it out to be (Gude, 2012).

Experimental Methods

On a basic level, the concept of experimentation emerged during Finn, Sara, and my conversations as a reference to new and perhaps unconventional methods through which both teachers and students might pursue inquiry. Finn described that within her own approach to pedagogy, part of facilitating a keener sense of observation and empowerment for her students involves helping them to consider multiple ways of approaching a problem or a question. In doing so, she not only asks her students to consider their options, but also their relationships to power structures. As Luke (2012) describes, she operates from and asks her students to operationalize critical perspectives that interrogate "truth" and power in terms of who gets to construct it, who has access to it, and whose interests it represents (p. 4). She elaborated that she finds this stance particularly necessary because, even within everyday activities in her classroom, she has

observed students contending with (and often assimilating) a large degree of restrictions on the ways in which they can experiment with knowledge and express their own learning. She explained:

I never say [students] can't do X, but they feel like... I can't stand up right now, I can't try this other way of interacting with the situation or looking at it because I'm in the school arena and that's not what we do at school.

Choosing to encourage and support experimental methods, then, can not only serve to uncover new modes of thinking, but can also address some of the alienation that students experience when subjected to models of schooling that privilege conformity around the process of acquiring knowledge. As Beck (2005) notes, "Questioning why some constructions of knowledge are legitimated while others are not encourages individuals to develop the critical awareness necessary to challenge the status quo and discover alternatives to existing social inequalities" (p. 393). By drawing attention, in the way that Finn describes above, to the imposed and internalized limitations on the ways it is possible to learn, it becomes possible for both students and educators to trouble the role that power plays in formal education.

Working with artistic forms provides one, though certainly not the only, way for students to experiment with a variety of methods of inquiry. Early on in our conversations, Sara asked me to elaborate on why I ask students to be "creative" in courses that are not explicitly labeled as artistic. I explained that "I'm looking for [students] to think about some different ways (aside from academic writing) that [they] can represent [their] ideas and experiment with things." In inviting them to play with the

form they use to explore and express their ideas, I described how I wanted student to consider “What [they] are going to do, what [they] are going to make, what [they] are going to use to make it, and why [they] going to do that.” Sara replied that, even in teaching art classes, she finds it important to push students to vary their modes of inquiry. She said:

It’s funny because I’m often doing the opposite [in suggesting], ‘Writing is ok! You can totally include that in your art practice.’ Students will sometimes ask, ‘I need to make a painting that shows this?’ And I’m like, ‘No, there are so many other things!’

Sotiropoulou-Zormpala (2012) provides another way of thinking about approaching education through creative lenses in an approach called “aesthetic teaching” (p. 123). Rather than positioning an artistic approach (e.g. sculpting, painting, drawing) as the medium through which students can learn academic skills such as print literacy, aesthetic teaching understands “each taught subject... as a possible framework within which a [student] may have aesthetic experiences” (p. 125). Likewise, critical art pedagogy scholarship suggests that any educational experience is one through which it is possible to explore inquiry about equity, justice, and power. In addition to interests in ecological stewardship (Graham, 2007), democratic practice (Jennings, 2010; Villaverde, 1998; Woodson, 2000), and interrogating the role of power within institutions (Grushka, 2010; Ivashkevich, 2012), critical art pedagogy projects have taken up community education for queer youth (Grace & Wells, 2007), anti-racist and multicultural education (Clark, et al., 2011; Lee, 2013; Noel, 2003), indigenous sovereignty (Seppi, 2011), feminist activism (Nordlund, et al., 2011), food justice (BellFinn, 2011), and anti-

consumerist activism (Sandlin, 2010). This wide array of social justice concerns within the area of critical art pedagogy demonstrates the way in which the coupling of creative processes with critical frameworks can help students to explore critiques of oppression in diverse contexts. Since neither the outcomes nor the process of criticality explored is predetermined, students and educators experimenting with creative methods are able to take up a diverse array of questions and concerns related to realizing a more just world.

Experimenting with Duration

Finn, Sara, and I observed duration as an element with and through which teachers, students, and artists can choose to experiment. In wanting to explore connections between what processes of learning are possible within formal anti-oppressive education to those that have happened in the realms of conceptual art, I brought several works of art to our discussions. My hopes in doing so were that Sara and Finn might be able to help me articulate points of overlap and inspiration regarding how what these artists were doing could translate to pedagogical possibilities in helping students to explore anti-oppressive frameworks in our own classrooms. During our discussion of particular works of art, we often remarked on what the use of time communicated within and about the piece — for example, how long artists were able or willing to commit to an action or concept, what they were able to convey in a very small amounts of time, and/or how their overall use of time impacted the message of each piece. For example, in our discussion of Sulkowicz's (2014-15) *Mattress Performance: Carry That Weight*, Sara remarked that because of the performance's lengthy duration, "I kept thinking about that piece this entire year." Sara read Sulkowicz's commitment to

perform the piece for up to a year as a means of communicating the importance of her message, as well as the ongoing nature of both her own trauma and healing. I shared my own observations that the durational element was one that media often had the most difficult time depicting. Particularly at the beginning of the performance, there was a tendency for both the media and sexual violence survivor advocacy groups to focus on the mattress itself as a symbolic object, but to under-explore the durational element that was also very significant to the performance. Sara replied that even if the media may have communicated the performance in “soundbites,” Sulkowicz’s work was impactful to her “because she didn’t disappear from the headlines” over the course of the entire year of her performance.

Regardless of how effectively news media portrayed the durational element of *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight*, Sara, Finn, and I agreed that the extended sense of struggle and mindfulness Sulkowicz presented around the experience of surviving sexual violence was an important part of the work. We each expressed that we hoped to sensitize students to duration as an impactful element that they could also explore within their own projects. For example, Sara’s assignment for students to carry and document an object for twenty-four hours gave them the opportunity to repeatedly consider their own (as well as others’) relationship to that object for a longer period of time than might be typical. We discussed how this practice can not only develop a form of mindfulness, but can also expose students to questions about how the duration of an inquisitive and/or creative exercise matters to the learning that surrounds it.

In addition to discussing lengthy duration as an impactful element, we also discussed how it is possible to organize curriculum around very small amounts of time, such as Finn explained in her use of Instagram to invite students to make connections to their own and each other's school work outside of the traditional school day. Connecting this idea and strategy to other artworks we discussed, I mentioned:

We've been talking about durational time, but there is also 'tiny time'... like with the Gran Fury piece where they went around and replaced the front page of the New York Times with their own story... and while setting that up took a long time probably, the action itself was just a second... and also with Regina Galindo's piece, she just walks between two buildings, which couldn't have taken her longer than five minutes.

Sara responded by describing some of the ways she had previously worked with students to identify possibilities for creative intervention in very brief moments. She shared an assignment she had facilitated with students in which "they have one class period to make something that is going to be totally ephemeral." Within this assignment, students could change, but not damage or harm, their environment in order "to make people notice the space in a different way." Sara reported that though students often seemed initially overwhelmed by these parameters, they often ended up making really impactful work and finding meaning in the restraints she had given them. In Figures 3 and 4, Sara documented the ways in which students shifted environmental materials such as leaves into arrangements through which they intended to attract an observer's attention and provoke inquiry. By working with the time constraint Sara had given them, students were also able to experience how the element of duration could become impactful within their

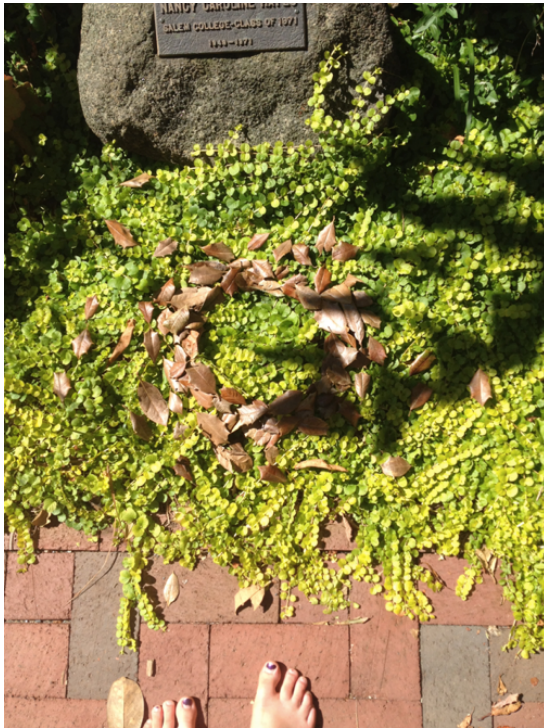


Figure 3. Ephemeral Project 1



Figure 4. Ephemeral Project 2

processes — a knowledge that Sara observed many of them also carried forward into later projects that they had a longer time to make.

Experimentation with Publicness

Another element that we discussed that offers potential for experimentation was whether and how teachers, artists, and students can play with ideas of publicness. As Finn described in her decision to make her students' projects available on Instagram, increasing the publicness of those projects enabled her students to make connections to each other's ideas. Similarly, Sara's 24-hour-object project seemed to open up new connections and experiences for students both participating in and witnessing the project precisely because they became more, or differently public. In our discussion of Ana Mendieta's early works, Finn observed how, in *Moffitt Building Piece*, Mendieta (1973a) positioned representations of violence (in the form of animal blood) on the border between the "privacy" of an apartment building and the publicness of a city sidewalk. Sara commented that the piece felt like a social experiment, and in that way, is very different than Mendieta's (1973b) performance *Rape Scene*, which she staged in the "privacy" of her own apartment. How Mendieta chose to approach space, facilitate a relationship with her audience, and use materials are all related to her own exploration of the social dynamics of intimate violence. As forms of pedagogy, her work can serve as a case study for thinking about the framing of questions for others as well as the exploration of knowledge for oneself. Curriculum organizers such as Finn, Sara, and myself, then, might benefit from closely considering how Mendieta experiments with

various elements (e.g. social reactions, bodily matter, particular spaces, particular times) in exploring a concept.

We had a similar conversation about Tatyana Fazlalizadeh's (2012-13) *Stop Telling Women to Smile* project, which Sara described as a public forum. She commented that putting posters in spaces where harassment itself happens functions as a statement that says, "we're going to activate the space where the actual problem is occurring." In this way, Fazlalizadeh's work represents an experimentation with the forms that a response can take. By creating a physical response, she experimented with both material and duration. By involving other women who have experienced harassment in her process, she generated supportive dialogue and solidarity. While Fazlalizadeh's works certainly don't represent the only or best way to respond to street harassment, they do involve specific choices that have the potential to produce a certain set of results (e.g. a sense of solidarity and resistance). In considering Fazlalizadeh's work as modeling a form of inquiry, what seemed worth considering to Sara, Finn, and myself was not so much how to get to those specific results, but how experimentation with multiple dimensions of an idea can unfold with different kinds of impact along the way. Roth (2014) suggests that approaching curriculum in this way can enliven an awareness of learning, like living, as processes that are constantly unfolding. Particularly in educational discourses that prioritize specific objectives as having the capacity to correlate directly to particular, anticipatable outcomes, it can be helpful for both teachers and students to consider how the educational undertakings in works like *Stop Telling*

Women to Smile involves a set of choices that have impacts, but whose impacts are not necessarily always measurable or foreseeable.

Emphasis on Process

Much of what Finn, Sara, and I discussed during our conversations links back to how cultivating a consideration of process is an important part of pedagogies in which both teachers and students are open to experimentation. Likewise, much critical art pedagogy scholarship emphasizes engagements with art as part of a gradual, ongoing process. Grushka (2010) speaks to the ways in which often, the very process of experimenting with artistic methods and approaches, coupled with critiques regarding power and equity, can function as a valuable, transformative process for both students and educators. Conceived of as rhizomatic (Wiebe, et al., 2007), spiraling (Gude, 2012), and layered (Jennings, 2010), framings of critical art pedagogy as open and non-linear create a sense of critical inquiry as necessarily complex and ongoing. Much like the systemic problems educators can use it to address, praxis within critical arts pedagogy does not involve quick or simple fixes; that is, because systemic oppression is complex and ever evolving, genuine attempts to understand and address its iterations must be so as well. As Greene (2013) explains, there is inherent value in exploratory efforts to define and envision connections vis-à-vis creative processes, and ending with a product that is intelligible as complete is not necessary for facilitating learning.

Finn, Sara, and I were careful to differentiate “creativity” from “production”, since for us, creativity is linked to cultivating a sense of observation and responding to the surrounding world. This mode is distinct from production, which can involve making

without a direct awareness in mind — a example existing in the form of production present in supplying answers on a standardized test. One of the dangers in this understanding of production is the way in which such standardization often requires students to separate their own perspectives and experiences from the knowledge they encounter in official curriculum (Ferguson, 2013). As Villaverde (1998) suggests, utilizing art within the context of critical pedagogy can be useful for students for many reasons: because it invites them to experiment with chaos and imagination, because it serves as a kind of holistic involvement that can address the sense of alienation that many students experience within formal education, because it serves as a means through which to explore the “conglomeration of the political, emotional, and intellectual contexts in which [they] interact,” and because it provides students with ways to explore social critiques (p. 196).

For Sara, creativity involves pushing her students to “address an issue by any means possible”, including strategies and mediums they might not have previously thought possible, such the inclusion of writing in visual art, as she suggested above. Sara described this praxis as “going in any direction and having fun with it” while at the same time being attentive to the relationship between medium and message. She explained how students can lose out on opportunities to deeply consider their process by skipping directly to the medium without thinking about its relationship to the message they are trying to convey. For example, she related past experiences in which her students had used collage without seeming to think much about how that particular medium can provide rich opportunities to analyze representation and to consider the messages implied

in juxtaposing various images. To help her students consider these possibilities, she raised the historical example of conceptual artist Martha Rosler collaging images from *Good Housekeeping* alongside images from the Vietnam War in order to provoke questions about domesticity, transnational politics, gender, and race. Sara explained to her students that in collaging, “you’re using things that have already been circulated, that have already been filtered through someone trying to get you to think in a certain way.” In encouraging students to experiment with various mediums, then, Sara’s anecdote helped us to consider how it is important to make room for learning about the conceptual dimensions that particular mediums can offer. These conversations can then invite students to consider how using a particular medium impacts their own process and paves the way for various interpretations of their work by both themselves and their audiences.

As Sara suggested in her collage anecdote, engagement with creative processes can also provide opportunities in which to introduce and hone critical practices and vocabularies for identifying texts outside of students’ own creation. For example, creating visual texts can familiarize students with strategies that other media producers (e.g. artists, advertisers) employ when constructing a visual message. The results of building this critical awareness can be wide ranging — from helping students to be more savvy of the ways in which advertisers rely on problematic tropes for selling their goods, to paving the way for students to intervene in and/or subvert texts they find to be troubling (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).

Possible Outcomes

Sara described the arts practice she hopes to cultivate with and for her students as as form of synthesis. Through art, it becomes possible to make what she explained as:

A completely new creation out of discussion... So with the students, [you can] say, 'Okay, you're thinking about these issues, we're having these conversations, and something totally new can rise out of that, whether that's an object or a video or a painting'... So there's [a creation] that represents something so nebulous [as an idea.]

As Springgay (2004) suggests, when students have the chance to pursue research in a variety of forms, they have the opportunity to highlight connections between visual and embodied dimensions, which can ultimately foster an understanding of their lived experiences as agentic rather than passive, normalized, and scientific. Jevic and Springgay (2008) emphasize arts-based inquiry as an open-ended methodology that engages what refer they to as the “unthought”, creating space for student researchers to surprise themselves, to fail creatively, and to forge connections unforeseen by their instructors (p. 84). Sara described creative projects as providing the opportunity for students to create a manifestation of their own thought processes, or, as she described, “this [creation] represents [your] time thinking about this [concept].”

Finn echoed the importance of creative, experimental practice as a way of “leaving the door open for creating the things you wished existed” as both a teacher and a student. Together, we linked these idea of creation, imagination, and hopefulness back to the practice of cultivating skills and sensibilities necessary for responding to conditions in which neither teachers nor students currently have all the things they need to address

problems in the world. Sanders-Bustle (2003) notes that the creative elements of arts pedagogy can lend themselves well to critical engagements, as they enable (and perhaps require) learners to imagine the world in different ways than they may be accustomed — to challenge their own ways of seeing and to envision alternatives. Furthermore, contextualizing arts praxis itself as a form of literacy opens the door for dialogue about the role of art in shaping, perpetuating, and even challenging existing knowledge (Albers, 1997).

Finn described that cultivating experimental sensibilities is particularly necessary, given the problematic structure that is currently prevalent within scripted, test-oriented approaches to education. She explained, “I feel like so often in traditional school settings, the type of education that teachers are expected to put out there is still that old-school mindset of: here are the facts, memorize the facts, produce.” She pointed out that this rigid, hierarchical approach to education is not only limiting for teachers, but also damaging to students, who learn to prioritize grades, but not how to “actually learn for learning’s sake, or because they’re interested, or because they care about it.” In describing why the system of “kids learning, but not learning” is problematic, Finn explained that a model of education in which the teacher has all of the knowledge and the primary role of the students is to receive that knowledge neither accounts for the role that the students can play in producing knowledge nor takes their own interests into consideration.

In responding to this pattern, Finn spoke to the importance of being willing to derail and depart from hierarchical modes of teaching and learning. She described that

often, when she gives assignments that provide opportunities for students to bring in their personal experiences and have dialogue instead of “one way conversations,” students react with surprise, asking questions like “Wait what, you want me to have my own thoughts? You’re not gonna tell me what’s right? Are you sure?” Finn echoed several central goals of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1980/1999): theorizing and enacting democratic practices by interrogating the role of power within education, engaging education in relation to social issues that perpetuate oppression, attempting to recognize the inherent value in all who participate in educational processes, and pursuing conversations about citizenship and democratic participation in relation to equity. By encouraging students to co-facilitate an educational environment in which they are not only encouraged but also responsible for generating inquiry, teachers working in the way that Finn suggests can not only help students to cultivate their own curiosities and critiques, but can also be open to the possibility that they can learn with and alongside their students.

Freire (1970) describes this form of education as departure from the banking method, in which students are understood as passive recipients of a teacher’s knowledge. He claims that when educators move toward a participatory model in which students and teachers come together in an egalitarian fashion around a set of problems, the potential for education to enable transformation and liberation is great. Within this framework, creativity can be both a means by which to challenge dominant modes of education and also the continual result of said challenges. Greene (2013) posits creativity as a means of connecting personal experiences with the surrounding world — a process which bears

strong resemblances to pedagogical efforts themselves, and which Greene suggests is suppressed by increasing standardization within formal education (p. 251). Greene proposes that creative efforts are not standardizable precisely because they deal with questions that may not have answers at all, and that learning to dwell within potentially unanswerable questions is of tantamount importance to cultivating rich social imaginations (p. 252). At the very least, Finn, Sara and I agreed that experimenting with creative methods has the capacity to help students to form their own inquiries about their surrounding contexts, to be more mindful about the methods they use, and to feel more empowered to try new ways of learning and expressing themselves.

Trust

The idea of trust first arose during our discussions of the qualities of institutional cultures that promote healthy collaborations at all levels of teaching and learning (e.g. between teachers and students, among students, etc.). Finn described how she once had the opportunity to work at a school with a principal who enabled and supported collaboration, explaining, “he had the trust in his staff that we were going to do amazing things with the kids because that was our prerogative.” Recalling the freedom that this trust enabled while also recalling experiences of working under less trustful administrations, Finn stated, “It would be nice if school hierarchy as a whole would be more open to that and have trust in their employees.” Without that trust, she commented, it can become very difficult to cultivate a vibrant educational atmosphere. She juxtaposed her struggles with teaching in less trusting atmospheres with the institutional culture at the summer academic program where she, Sara, and I met. In this context, faculty are

afforded time to establish relationships one another and space to work collaboratively, elements which Bettez (2008) and Tolentino (2011) explain are valuable in building critical communities in which educators can dialogue about how to cultivate anti-oppressive inquiry.

Sara commented that having the opportunity to problem-solve and generate new curriculum together affords faculty a sense of trust that functions much better than top-down mandates to change or adapt teaching strategies. She shared her observations that in many public school settings, teachers can often be defensive when teaching artists come to work with their classes, because the collaboration was not their decision, and they may perceive the teaching artist's presence as an imposition, or an insinuation that their own teaching is inadequate. At the summer program, where faculty are able to work with each other because they choose to (and are also given space to work on their own if they elect to do so), many faculty seem particularly motivated to provide a rich educational experience for the students. We agreed that sustaining this sense of trust school-wide allows for the proliferation of creativity and the exchange of ideas.

I mentioned how a specific example of trust manifest in institutional practice is the optional seminars that faculty offer at the summer program. With the trust of the administration, they develop hour-long sessions on areas of their own interest that they then lead with students in the afternoons after required classes are finished for the day. Faculty have a large degree of freedom in deciding the topic and format of their seminars, as well as their collaborators from either within or beyond the official faculty. Students attend the seminars voluntarily, and seminars remain well-attended throughout the

session. The seminars do not include any type of formal assessment; rather, students have the option of attending and the teachers are not required (and often do not choose) to test the students on what they have learned afterwards. Seminar topics have ranged from interdisciplinary studies of emotion to science fiction writing workshops, critical studies of comic books, etc.

Sara, Finn, and I all commented on the incredible amount of educational opportunities that are able to emerge out of this environment of trust. I specifically reflected on how the trust present in the optional seminar structure operates on many levels: the administration's trust in the teachers that they will present compelling material, the teacher's trust that students will attend the seminars of their choice and get meaning out of them, the students' trust in teachers that they will involve them in a meaningful educational experience, etc. I described how this practice struck me as "very different than what is present in so many schools, where there is distrust on so many levels... on the level of the policy makers, administrators, teachers, and students." I commented that, in response to this pervasive distrust, "I see a lot of teachers respond by saying, 'I'm just going to shut my door and do my thing and try to make this space of my classroom okay and not deal with the rest of this stuff.'" We agreed that this stance is limiting not only because it is alienating to teachers themselves, but also because it restricts the kind of possibilities we have seen unfold in an atmosphere that is more trusting of people at multiple stages of their educational experiences. As Bettez (2008) describes, purposefully building community for the sake of furthering anti-oppressive inquiry not only runs "contrary to the ideology of individualism and competition" that

neoliberal institutions often promote, but can also provide support for students and educators in "furthering each other's critical thinking" (p. 291-92).

Internalizing Fear and Limitations

In expanding on how the lack of trust can stifle collaborative dynamics among teachers, we also discussed how it can impede learning for students. Finn described her observations of how students often put limitations on themselves because they are afraid of doing something wrong or being reproached by an authority figure. As a specific example, she mentioned how, during class workshops in which students work on projects such as the Micro Casas described earlier, students sometimes ask her questions such as, "Can I use the scissors?" Finn explained that she often responds, "Why are you even asking me if you can use the scissors? You can use everything!" She observed that, despite the autonomous atmosphere she attempts to foster during her classes, questions like "Can I use the scissors?" come from a sense of limitation and fear that students have internalized as a result of being in an environment in which they often do not experience institutional trust. In response to this dynamic, Finn mentioned that she tries to encourage students to think about what restraints they put on themselves in relation to the restrictions imposed on them by school culture.

All three of us linked this anecdote to an explicit lack of trust and an internalization by students that authority figures will not trust them to use scissors (in a micro sense) or to be original and creative (in a macro sense). I remarked:

[This pattern] connects directly back to what we were talking about in regards to trust. It happens on so many different levels that at some point I think [students and teachers] start to internalize that people aren't going to trust them to use scissors, to craft creative assignments, to have some flexibility, and so [as a consequence], they just need to teach and learn in this very [standard] way.

For Finn, part of facilitating creative projects involves not only challenging these implicit limitations on curriculum, but also fostering an environment in which students can become aware of the ways in which school has taught them to be fearful and to limit themselves. By challenging the mentality of certain things and activities not being allowed in school — e.g. the idea of “that’s not what we do at school” — she described that she hopes to help students become more aware of the possibilities that trust and freedom can afford, as well as how to navigate factors that may be limiting their capacities to be trustful and free.

Questioning Expertise

In our early discussions about trust and how to navigate daily teaching praxis in an anti-oppressive way, Sara mentioned that it is helpful to become attuned to the expectations that students already have regarding teacher-student dynamics. Some students may already be critical of institutionalized education as an exercise in authority that does not recognize their own capacities to learn (Illich, 1971), while others may have internalized these views and become complicit in a passive model of education that marginalizes what they think and say (Brooks & Thompson, 2005). Sara explained that because these perceptions alone can potentially impede a student’s capacity to trust their teacher, it is important for educators to develop a critical awareness about the institutional roles they occupy, as well as the various possibilities for how to navigate those roles. She

noted that students often “have the expectation that [teachers are] just going to talk to them, or at them in a way, and part of what all three of us are saying is that we want to have conversations.” In order to facilitate a dynamic in which these conversations are possible, it is important for teachers to consider how, given that they are “part of this formal structure of education, [they] are actually interacting” with their students.

Furthermore, Sara described being invested in crafting a dynamic in which it is possible to question the role of teacher as expert along with her students “so I’m not just telling [them] how it is and [they] are just going to absorb what I say.” Finn echoed:

Yeah, I’m definitely stressing to them, ‘Argue with me! Don’t just take what I’m saying to be true.’ Sometimes when I say that for the first time, they’re like, ‘What? You would lie to us?’ And I’m like, no, not purposefully, but you could have a different idea — you don’t have to believe mine as 100% true. That goes against the traditional teacher-knows-best model.

Finn’s insistence on the importance of discussion and questioning ideas dovetails with ideas in critical and transformative pedagogy scholarship that students have the capacity to meaningfully navigate and interrogate their own educational experiences, and that it is helpful for teachers to honor their efforts to do so (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2000). As Finn and Sara both described, pedagogies that recognize the innate intelligence of each student de-center the teacher as the sole source of knowledge and position students as valuable contributors to any kind of educational exercise.

Reflecting on her own experiences in which she has observed the “teacher as expert” trope troubled in hopeful ways, Sara recalled an interaction with a teacher she encountered while working with an arts integration program. Though this particular

teacher was initially resistant to using art in her classroom, she reported that through incorporating the arts, she was able to make room for original contributions from her students, and that this practice fundamentally shifted her relationship to them. Sara described that though this teacher had “more of an abrasive teaching style... she said that the arts had made her trust her students more... Because it was an arts-based lesson and they were so engaged, she was able to see them take charge of their lessons and their own learning.” While art is not essential to this shift, in this particular case, it was the element that helped the teacher to regard her students as producers of original works and as capable of pursuing their own modes of research.

The shift that this teacher experienced serves as a valuable example of the importance of not only troubling ideas that students may have about teachers as experts, but also the ways in which teachers can learn to de-center themselves. Lovett (2007) explains that this paradigm shift is particularly valuable, since “Too often learning environments are structured in a top-down, hierarchical model,” and that within educational contexts that value student-directed research, students can learn to notice the structures through which knowledge becomes communicated and legitimized (p. 12). In his description of the Free School movement, Mercogliano (1998) posits trust as foundational to the belief that people inherently want to learn and that unlearning fear and distrust of students’ ability to direct their own learning involves considering “how [educators] manage to keep kids from learning, rather than [understanding] how they learn in the first place” (p. 64). Responding to Finn’s students’ disbelief about interacting with curriculum that prioritizes original expression and considering the context of school

environments that often do not function this way (e.g. high-stakes testing with very clearly delineated “correct” answers), Sara and I agreed that it is imperative to establish an environment in which both teachers and students have opportunities to trust each another’s ability to learn and to contribute meaningfully to a community of learners. Notably, this dynamic is enabled by pedagogy that places an emphasis on research and creativity as meaningful processes in and of themselves, rather than primarily as means to an end.

Access

Another dimension of trust that we discussed is the trust implicit in the pedagogical stance that teachers don’t always need to have access to student reflections and ideas. Finn and Sara both mentioned that practices like journaling and drawing in sketchbooks have been an important source of education throughout their own lives. Because they both recognized the ways in which ongoing, reflective practices have been valuable to themselves as learners, they each explained the importance of trying to foster spaces for their students to be thoughtful and develop ownership over their ideas without the oversight of a teacher or even necessarily of other peers. As an example of this kind of trust, Sara described an ongoing sketchbook assignment that she had included in her summer program curriculum for several years. When she first taught the course, she co-taught with another instructor, who framed the assignment as involving a minimum of one sketch per day. Though there were no grades in the curriculum, Sara recalled observing students becoming anxious about their sketchbooks, particularly around when and whether the teacher was going to check on their progress. When she became the lead

teacher, she began to frame the exercise explicitly in the beginning as an ongoing exercise in independent reflection that is helpful for the students themselves. She explained to them, “this [sketchbook] is yours... putting all your thoughts down is going to be so valuable to you.” She underscores this framing by emphasizing that she will not be checking up on student’s sketchbook entries; to do so, she explained, risks making the assignment more about her approval than about giving students opportunities to explore their own experiences.

In addition to de-centering teachers as the ultimate source of knowledge, placing an emphasis on the process of cultivating ideas signals to students that their own thoughts are worthy of further attention, and that they have much to learn from themselves. Sara commented on how even the pedagogical strategy of arranging students together in small, unsupervised groups can reflect a belief that it is important for the teacher to not always be in control or have access to what students are thinking and saying. In reflecting on the impetus for employing this strategy in her own teaching, she commented, “What’s motivating them to learn? It’d better not just be my stamp of approval.” I mentioned that any strategy that allows students independent or private reflection can signal a radical trust in them and their intellectual capacities, particularly as juxtaposed with practices of constantly assessing and measuring student “progress” in the “accountability” culture that currently pervades contemporary education policy and practice. Desai and Koch (2012) echo that engaging in practices that enable students to make meaning on their own terms aligns with Spivak's (1993) idea of "unlearning", or calling into question the role of power in education and whose interests educational culture serves. In conversation with

Sara and Finn, I shared my thoughts that always requiring students to reveal, show, or display their work “lines up with a structure that demands ‘accountability’ and demands for learning to be shown in certain ways (e.g. it only counts if it shows up as a score on this test)... [Alternately], trusting students to make [personal reflection] a meaningful experience for themselves” has the potential to be worthwhile on so many levels.

Cultivating Empathy

During our initial conversations about cultivating anti-oppressive praxis in everyday pedagogy, Finn, Sara, and I each spoke to the importance of developing a holistic sense of empathy within educational settings (hooks, 1994). Finn described the importance of teachers being as aware of and empathetic to students’ struggles as possible. She relayed an anecdote in which one of her students had submitted an assignment in which she had written about experiences of discomfort with her own body image. Finn responded with written feedback in which she both acknowledged the student’s conflicts and shared some of her own experiences with having and overcoming some of her own troubles with body image. At the end of the year, this student wrote Finn a note in her yearbook about how much Finn’s feedback had meant to her and how helpful it was to know that somebody could relate to her experiences. Recalling this event, Finn said, “It’s such an important part of teachers’ jobs to see students as whole people that maybe don’t get everything they need from their parents, their friends, or the world,” and that for teachers to be able to “reach out when they can is so important.”

I offered my convictions that it is also important to cultivate an environment in which students can be empathetic toward one another. I noted:

Facilitating environments in which students can [care for each other] is a delicate balance because [expecting] everyone to get along all the time and be all gooey with each other isn't real. It's important to always have room for people to not be into what's going on or to not like each other.

In my own understanding, retaining these expectations of community is important, because otherwise education can become an uncritical tool for enforcing conformity. In other words, it is helpful to not overemphasize togetherness or group-work as synonymous with or as a means to trust — in fact, sometimes trust might involve cultivating the space for someone to feel skeptical, or to place themselves outside of a group, as Desai, et al. (2010) posit in the idea of a “dispute” as a way to think about collaboration that doesn't seek progress through agreement or even purport to move in the direction of a final resolution (p. 54). Cultivating empathy does not necessarily have to revolve around consensus; rather, it can also mean retaining room for students to not like what's happening or to not feel like they have to be a part of the group.

Sara noted that educational cultures that prioritize competition and grades can serve as a barrier to cultivating empathy, since these frameworks teach students to see each other through a lens of rivalry rather than compassion. She noticed the absence of this dynamic at the academic summer program and speculated that, because grades aren't a part of the institutional culture, students might not be thinking as explicitly about how they compare to one another, but rather how they can relate to each other. Sara linked this increased sense of empathy to a general environment in which students have many opportunities to experience appreciation for and connection to one another. Additionally, making specific pedagogical choices such as the group work she requires in her classes

allows students to foster a space for “learning how to empathize and learning how to communicate in a way that I think they don’t always get to do in their regular school years.”

All three of us spoke to the ways in which formal educational settings can sometimes makes empathy more difficult to prioritize or express. In thinking through the difficulties of becoming attuned to systemic oppression as linked to a lack of emphasis on empathizing with their communities, I reflected:

It makes me think about how infrequent those conversations [about empathy] can be in a formal educational setting. Because why would you think that you were part of a community and that you have a responsibility to others if you’ve just been on this [track] like, well it doesn’t matter, I’m in the AP class and I don’t care about anybody else — which isn’t to say that individual students aren’t navigating that in various ways, but it’s not like the broader structure is encouraging them to do that, and in many cases it’s actively discouraging them from doing that.

As Wolk (2007) describes, if the primary purpose of schools is understood to be job preparation, then this lack of empathy makes sense, because “a nation of workers does not need to vote, feel historical empathy, be informed of current events, act to end prejudice, question cultural assumptions, or care for people in other countries” (p. 651). However, if the goal of schooling is to nourish the potential for empathy, Wolk suggests, curricular and pedagogical decisions should reflect that priority.

Sara shared how she has sometimes chosen to discuss her personal experiences with oppression as a strategy for building empathy in her classrooms. In describing the impact of alienation and the need for allies in her own life as a young person, she has offered her own story of feeling marginalized within and by school environments as an

example for students to consider how being compassionate with one another might benefit their own communities. Her use of personal narrative as a way to help students consider the ways in which they are implicated in broader structures thus also provides a way for them to consider the potential to have a different kind of impact, such as becoming an ally or an advocate out of a sense of responsibility to those around them.

I echoed that our conversations had caused me to think more about how trust relates to what kind of presence I want to have with students in educational spaces and how various modes of presence can impact the potential to build empathy. I shared that during the most recent session of the summer program, I had asked my students, “In what ways is it possible to shift our presences in relation to each other?” In posing this question, I invited students into my own inquiry about what ways of being are possible within education, how to become mindful of various modalities for understanding and relating, and how to consider modes of presence in relation to empathy and trust. As a part of this inquiry, I experimented with practices that I thought might build trust in small ways, such as assigning students a partner for the duration of the summer and asking them to be aware of each other even when they’re not directly working together. Finn reiterated the importance of building connections that can help students to be curious about how others feel and what they think, such as she attempted to do by using Instagram to generate curiosity among her students about what they were each working on in her Spanish classes.

Dis/comfort

The idea of dis/comfort came up in two ways during our first conversation: in Finn's description of her student's essay about feeling uncomfortable in her body, and in Sara's description of how she "would have loved to have had an ally during times where [she] felt [she] was the only person being insulted or being effected and felt too alone" to address violent dynamics within her own education. As she explained, "the silence of no one else looking uncomfortable or speaking up made me feel really attacked." In both Finn and Sara's anecdotes, the element of comfort presents itself as a privilege: to feel comfortable in one's own body or despite an oppressive atmosphere that others are creating. It also resonates differently in each context in terms of desired outcome — while Finn responded to her student with assurance that comfort in her own body was ultimately possible, Sara's desired goal was to identify discomfort among potential allies in order to lessen her own alienation.

We circled back to the idea of dis/comfort during our second conversation, in which we explored it more explicitly in relation to pedagogy. Finn, Sara, and I agreed that pursuing anti-oppressive pedagogy involves getting to know each group of students in order to gauge their dis/comfort levels around issues of oppression. Once a teacher has this awareness, it becomes possible to negotiate ways to challenge students productively without completely alienating them. During our discussion of cultivating this balance between comfort and discomfort, I spoke to the challenge of "trying to figure out how to navigate expanding that comfort zone for some people [with privilege] but not just catering to them... that's annoying for everyone else, because they're like, 'Ugh! Yet

again, it's all about them!" In situations like the one I described, maintaining the comfort of students with privilege continues to center their experiences at the expense of others. Kumashiro (2000) describes this dynamic as having the potential to arise in forms of critical pedagogy conceived of and/or practiced as "education that critiques privileging and Othering", explaining the capacity for this kind of pedagogy to be harmful if it only re-centers the norm, re-marginalizes the marginalized (p. 38 - 39). At the same time, Finn spoke to how completely alienating these students is not advantageous either. She described, "That's the worst, when [privileged students] shut down... it's almost like you can see the light switch go out in their eyes... they're like, 'I'm done with this.'"

Finn suggested that a mix of informal discussion and more structured assignments can help to navigate this balance. She explained:

Sometimes I'll assign readings that I'm hoping will get [students] to confront whatever [issue] and then we can dig into it that way, and it's also helpful to have a little distance [to] make it less, I don't want to say mandatory, but less like, 'Woah, this is so in my face!' and more like, 'Okay, we're looking at this issue over here and now we're going to pull back and [figure out] how we can connect it to us here and our community.'

She said that this approach is "a more effective way to have these conversations, to start at more of a 'neutral' spot some distance from them and then be like, okay, you know where I'm going — bring it in here and talk to me about it." By starting with an example that is somewhat removed from students' immediate lives, Finn provides a point of entry that students can connect to their own experiences through an organic process that allows them to draw connections to their own lives and communities, wherever they might be located in relation to power and oppression.

Dialogue

As Finn described, structuring opportunities for extended thinking and exchange of ideas can be a helpful way to facilitate deeper consideration of oppressive structures. Sara posited that, despite institutional and cultural limitations, education can serve as “a platform to have a difficult conversation.” Kumashiro (2000) describes the need to create a space for students to work through the crises involved in expanding their comfort zones to become aware of their relationship to power while pursuing ideas about how to generate social change. Sara and Kumashiro both imply that education that involves consideration of social inequities will necessarily be challenging for all parties involved. Because this difficulty is part of a dialectical process that unfolds over a period of time, Sara also spoke to the importance of educators developing skills and strategies for facilitating deep, intense, and sometimes uncomfortable learning. hooks (1994) describes the element of community as being especially important to facilitating this kind of dynamic, because “rather than focusing on issues of safety... a feeling of community creates a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us” (p. 40). Gude (2012) explains that pedagogy that revolves around a cultivation of creative praxis can go hand-in-hand with the community that hooks describes: “Being deeply invested in one’s own creative experience leads to the desire to communicate, to form a community based on subtle sharing of stories, observations, and insights” (p. 79).

In further discussing the relationship between creativity and anti-oppressive pedagogy, Finn, Sara, and I often circled back to the question of how to navigate a balance between comfort and discomfort in educational spaces. We discussed how doing

this involves being attentive to group dynamics, the range of personal relationships that students might have to both oppression and privilege, and how students interact with material introduced within any particular class. Sara described how it is advantageous for both teachers and students to be able to gauge their own comfort levels in order to tell when their comfort is tantamount to complacency, when they are challenging their comfort in the interest of growth, or when they have exceeded their comfort levels so far that they are no longer able to meaningfully engage with the educational experience.

Exceeding Comfort Through Creative Approaches

A key strategy that arose during these conversations about navigating dis/comfort was the use of creative projects. Sara felt that creative assignments are particularly important in this context because they place an emphasis on the way that the students interpret the assignments themselves, which allows for some autonomy and flexibility as students themselves decide what level of discomfort they are willing to explore. She commented that sometimes students can also support and learn to trust one another through this process. Finn echoed the benefit of students workshopping ideas with one another as a way to suggest new approaches and questions with each other. She explained her perspective on creative projects as “an outlet for expanding students’ minds [and] getting them to loosen up” in terms of the way that they approach knowledge production. Gude (2012) echoes this potential of creative works to function as conduits to discovery. In her spiral curriculum workshops, Gude describes facilitating “projects that investigate odd and offbeat subjects (these have included punishments, bling, hauntings, reality TV, wounds, lost flyers, fluidity, warning, uncertainty, concrete, and targets)” in order to help

both students and educators “surprise [themselves], recognizing aspects of [their] experiences of which [they] were not fully aware” (p. 81).

Finn explained that in framing creative assignments, she often utilizes a sense of craftiness, in which she uses the projects to indirectly guide students through exploration of ideas. Sara agreed that a degree of craftiness has been helpful for her in cultivating group dynamics in her classes. For example, Sara described that she sometimes assigns groups based on student personalities that she thinks will productively challenge one another. As another example, when conflict has emerged in groups where a member feels frustrated with or alienated by a member who is assuming dominance, she described the strategy of having a conversation with the former in which she says, “I’m going to give you tools for how to speak your mind, and then I want you to go ahead and do it.” By refusing to negotiate directly within the group, she provides students with opportunities to advocate for themselves and become empowered to navigate group dynamics without the direct oversight of a teacher. While this strategy is clearly not universal, it does exemplify the sense of craftiness that both Finn and Sara spoke to as a part of negotiating anti-oppressive education as an active process that involves being highly attentive to students’ experiences.

After listening to Finn and Sara, I commented that for me, teaching has involved finding “a balance between experimenting with craftiness and being super transparent with students about not having a specific outcome in mind” and clarifying to them that when I have them open-ended assignments, “I want [them] to make something awesome — I don’t know what that is because I’m not in [their] brains... I just want [them] to

think about stuff really hard and then [they'll] figure out what [they] want to make.”

Using creative projects in this way shifts responsibility to students themselves to be reflective and to explore their own ways of understanding and expressing ideas. It is distinctly different from models of knowledge that prioritize empirical “truths” that are framed as existing inherently externally to students’ knowledge.

Wounds, Blood, and Guts

At one point in our discussions, Sara observed how many of the artists we had been discussing often incorporated blood as a medium through which they seemed to be communicating, “I’m making you think about this, but I’m not making you so uncomfortable that you can’t engage it.” She described how their methods “pull [the viewer] in in a guttural ‘I just need to understand this’ way.” She offered a specific example from her own experience of watching a video installation project in a history of video art class in which artist Leticia Parente (1975) sewed the word “Brazil” into the calluses on the sole of her foot in *Marca Registrada* (Trade Mark). Sara commented that, in viewing the performance, she felt torn between watching and looking away. Finn commented that she has a similar experience with Galindo’s (2005) piece, *Perra*, in which she carves the word “perra” into her leg. I linked both the pieces and the reactions to them as being related to the ways that wounds can create moments of pause and empathy.

The possibilities for using these works such as *Marca Registrada* and *Perra* in anti-oppressive education are several: as texts through which to demonstrate the possibilities of embodied modes of inquiry and expression, and also as metaphors for

teachers to contemplate when considering how to negotiate dynamic that arise within anti-oppressive work, such as victimization, witnessing, and impact. Sara commented that, in the case of the former, “exposing students, especially at a younger age, to some of the body art stuff” introduces them to the idea that “you can use anything, including just yourself, to make that big of a message... just [your] presence as a body makes a difference.” Sara’s comments underscore the value in students coming to understand the potential in using a vast array of mediums to convey a message. The example of art that involves bodies as a part of the medium can be powerful but also feel risky and uncomfortable to both students and educators as they navigate the boundary between of comfort and discomfort. I commented:

On one hand, I really appreciate that [visceral] work and I have an interest in [introducing it] in contexts that don’t explicitly mark themselves as ‘creative’... to help students to consider what might it mean for them to make something that speaks to some of these issues that they’re implicated in. And that is such a tricky balance, because I’m never going to ask students to do something that involves them inflicting pain on themselves, but I think I would want to open up that possibility? I don’t know!

The example of students processing ideas in a way that causes themselves pain and injury caused me to hesitate at an ethical boundary — yet at the same time, since much of the practice of anti-oppressive education can be a painful one, perhaps these boundaries are helpful to consider. Kumashiro (2000) posits that anti-oppressive pedagogy must continually interrogate familiar understandings of the world and "must involve uncertainty, difference, and change" (p. 44). As Finn, Sara, and I discussed, too much

comfort does not necessarily function in the interest of a more equitable and just world -- as Kumashiro insinuates, comfort of some often comes at the expense of others.

Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol

During the course of Finn, Sara, and my conversations together, Emma Sulkowicz, the artist who made *Mattress Performance: Carry That Weight*, graduated from Columbia University. She completed her performance by carrying her mattress across the stage at Columbia College Days, a graduation ceremony held in the spring of 2015 at the end of Sulkowicz's tenure as a Columbia student. Shortly thereafter, she released a new piece, *Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol*, the piece I described previously in which Sulkowicz produced a website with a statement including suggestions for viewing and questions to consider while viewing, an embedded video, and a live comment section. Sara alerted Finn and me to the piece soon after Sulkowicz made it available. We each viewed it and then discussed our thoughts during our next scheduled conversation. We each agreed that the piece was difficult and painful to watch. We also each engaged with it differently: Sara watched the video, but did not read the statement or the comments, I read the statement, hesitated to watch the video but ultimately did, and read a few comments, and Finn read the statement, watched the video, read many of the comments, and then became so angry that she went outside of her house to hit the ground with a baseball bat. We each described being heavily impacted by the piece for several days after watching it.

During our conversations about the piece, Sara posed the question "How would you ever teach this? Could you ever teach this?" She explained that these questions

seemed important to her not only because the piece is so explicit, but because it seems so potentially damaging to its audience. She imagined that viewing it could not only induce discomfort, but also enact violence upon its viewers. Given our conversations about trust and a willingness to negotiate discomfort, Sara's questions allude to a broader set of ethical questions within anti-oppressive education. I responded that, despite these risks, the piece could potentially be very valuable to discuss in a classroom since it brings up important questions around the nature of "truth" and interpretation, as well as the lenses that people are using to make sense of the world around them. At the same time, requiring students to view it could run the risk of traumatizing them, or making them so uncomfortable that they can no longer engage with the material. Sara agreed that in any case, "by just introducing the topic [of violence], you are possibly damaging someone in the classroom." Linking this question back to previous experiences as a sexual health educator on a university campus, Sara emphasized the importance of coming back to the idea of how conversations about navigating sexual boundaries are so important to have, but can also be damaging for those with personal experiences of trauma. At the same time, she elaborated that not having the conversation at all also seems damaging. Like those conversations, Sara explained that Sulkowicz's piece is "going to fuck [the viewer] up — it is worth knowing it though? Is it worth having that conversation to get to deeper things?"⁵

⁵ Tolentino (2011) offers a thoughtful analysis in how these difficult dynamics can play out in her consideration of how conversations about racism can impact students on either side of racial privilege. McKittrick's (2014) troubling of the idea of educational "safe spaces" is also helpful to consider in relation to the ethics of pursuing education about systemic injustice.

I noted that the piece doesn't let sexual assault advocates off the hook either, since the piece is not just about the overtly sexist reactions that are especially prevalent in the comments of the piece (such as the treatment of the video as nothing but "bad porn"), or the implications that Sulkowicz is a liar or somehow deserves to be the recipient of violent acts; rather, the piece also brings up very difficult questions for people who have empathized with Sulkowicz's case and the general cause of sexual assault survivor advocacy. These questions, which appear in text on the website, include, "How well do you think you know me? Have we ever met? Do you think I'm the perfect victim or the world's worst victim?" (Sulkowicz, 2015, para. 10). Sara agreed that the piece implicates the viewer in a way that is uncomfortable because it questions the limits of knowledge — e.g. what it means for any viewer (sympathetic, skeptical, allied, or antagonistic) to "know" Sulkowicz herself, her experiences, or her artworks. I commented that this framing brought up the question of what it meant for the piece to be about me / the viewer and how my own experience of watching lead to an emotional experience of bewilderment — of being at a place of confusion and perhaps exasperation between empathizing, being upset, and having no idea of how to respond helpfully. Together, Finn, Sara, and I theorized this reaction as a possibly helpful place to be — that maybe being bewildered can provide new insights about ways to respond to sexual violence and break away from some of the prescriptive methods available that are not necessarily universally useful and that can also allow advocates to distance themselves from the very cause they are advocating. I brought up handbooks, hashtags, and even group mattress-carries as examples of survivor advocacy that allow for this kind of detachment at the

same time that they are often framed as universally meaningful actions and/or solutions. As Sara explained, Sulkowicz's work poses the point that advocates and others who want to address the root causes of violence not only have so much work to do, but also that and we/they don't always know how to do it. She wondered if this sense of bewilderment has the capacity to function as a new form of sensitization and move people to action because it lends new perspectives on the ways in which "bewilderment [can] move us to action more because it's like imagining gears that won't fit." Sara explained that there is often a "script of how to react that lets you then desensitize and say okay, I've done my part and I'm moving on, I've done enough — but this [piece] has made it so that... I can't make sense of it in a way that I'm still struggling through it." The moment of not knowing what to do or how to react, then, can serve as a meaningful precursor to new insights and actions. It can also serve as a helpful lens for viewing existing actions.

I have chosen to consider our reactions to this piece at length here because I think they represent a condensed experience in which all of the major themes of our discussions were present. Both Sulkowicz's piece itself as well as Finn's, Sara's, and my responses to it involve methods of observation, experimentation with both ideas and the reception of them, negotiations of trust, and experiences of comfort and discomfort. Both the piece and the way that we discussed it serve as an example of the kinds of conversations and ideas that can be present within anti-oppressive pedagogy approached as an ongoing process and explored through creative lenses and methods. Our ideas about the ways in which the process of creating art can dovetail with the pursuit of anti-oppressive curriculum and pedagogy form the foundation for the following sections of

this project. To get a better sense of how the understandings of pedagogy I developed with Sara and Finn might meld with the process of creating art as a kind of learning, I turn to a closer examination of the works of several artists in the next two chapters. Just as I cultivated a better sense of what creative processes within anti-oppressive pedagogy can entail and involve through speaking with other educators, I examine how contemporary artists pursue inquiry, cultivate strategies for understanding, and offer critical insights in ways that can serve as inspiration for educators and students hoping to do the same.

CHAPTER III

THE CURRICULAR POTENTIAL OF THE INDEXICAL PRESENT

In 2015, conceptual artist Adrian Piper released a statement pronouncing her intentions to immediately cease talking about her art. She explained that she hoped for viewers to relate as directly to her work as possible, and that by "talking and writing about this kind of relationship to [her] artwork, [she] in effect mediated that relationship through [her] discourse about it, thus undermining the ability of viewers to enter into it." Given Piper's concerns, the following analysis is particularly unfaithful, as I use much of what not only Piper has said but also what other scholars have written to understand the approach she forwards through her idea of the "indexical present" as a concrete moment to which she invites viewers to enter when encountering her work. What I can offer as a disclaimer is that my decision is prompted by a fascination with Piper's approach and strategies for apprehending specificity in the interest of generating social transformation. After all, these are goals that I, along with many other anti-oppressive educators, name frequently -- that we desire for our students to develop a sensitivity to power imbalances as they exist in their lives, and that along with this awareness, they might also cultivate a sense of when and how it is possible to intervene. In parsing the elements and ideas available within Piper's framework, I hope to offer ideas for how students and educators might approach the task of addressing oppression in the world around and as related to them, with the goal being not to emulate Piper's work exactly, but to explore a form of

pedagogy that asks participants to think broadly and carefully about the responses they create. In the interest of forwarding this kind of analysis, I consider the works of several other artists (Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Regina José Galindo, Emma Sulkowicz, and Gran Fury) who employ elements and strategies that also highlight immediacy as a means of initiating change.

As Piper (1993) describes it, the “indexical present” refers to a specific, identifiable space and time — a present one can point to. In this sense, the “index” references the capacity to specify a particular phenomena and to direct attention to the exact dynamics present within an occurrence, including the way in which one’s own relationship mediates an experience. When facilitating an encounter within the indexical present, Piper utilizes methods through which to direct a viewer’s attention to the specific players, forces, and sociopolitical dimensions involved in particular moments. In this way, the indexical present is a mode through which it becomes possible to prioritize specificity in time and space and also through which to direct attention to a point of interrogation, wonder, and/or confrontation. As a method she employs within her conceptual art, Piper describes the indexical present as a “way in which [she] attempts to draw the viewer into a direct relationship with the work, to draw the viewer into a kind of self-critical standpoint which encourages reflections on one’s own responses to the work” (Berger, 1999a, p. 13).

Piper (1989/1996a) refers to works created within the indexical present as potentially confounding to processes of categorization and categorization — she explains, “Artwork that draws one into a relationship with the other in the indexical present trades

easy classification — and hence xenophobia — for a direct and immediate experience of the complexity of the other, and of one's own responses to her. Experiencing the other in the indexical present teaches one how to see" (p. 248). Piper implies that oppressive ideologies obscure people's capacity to not only understand one another, but also to understand that their perspectives are obscured in the first place. While it is possible to read color-blindness into this argument (the idea that people should "get past" race and just see each other as people), I think that Piper's emphasis on complexity leaves room to understand identity categories and elements of difference as part of the complexity of every person. Furthermore, her idea of the indexical present allows room to consider multiple dynamics that inform the present, including elements that are not essential expressions of anyone's personhood, but which inform people's understandings of both themselves and others. In other words, while race is not innate, it does exist in a fluid way that influences people's experiences of themselves and each other in a way that can be (but is not inherently) very damaging. Within the precision of the indexical present, it can become possible to be attuned to all of these elements at work.

By engaging viewers in this mode, Piper intends to make it more difficult for viewers of her work to remove themselves from the process of understanding the points she is making, or to claim an objective stance in relation to the ideas she is presenting; rather, because she engages viewers at the nexus of their engagement with her work, she hopes to position them in such a way that they must consider their own relationship to what they experience and how they make sense of it. As Berger (1999a) explains, "By continually shifting the subject of her inquiry from a more neutral 'we' to a more

aggressive ‘you,’ or by shifting the locale of the aesthetic experience from a distant ‘there’ to an immediate ‘here,’ Piper locates the viewer and the art object in the same time frame” (p. 27). In utilizing this mode, Piper (2015) describes how she hopes to engineer an “unmediated relationship between subject and object” — that is, a direct connection between the viewer and the artwork they are perceiving. This strategy resembles the priorities that Sara and Finn named in which they hope to help their students foster a sense of connectedness to their observations alongside a honing of their lenses for considering those observations critically. Since, for Sara, Finn, and Piper, this means of engagement “demands of every viewer an intense engagement with one’s own concrete experience of the work,” the interaction can serve as a mechanism by which to learn more about one’s own way of understanding as well as to lay the foundation for new ways of perceiving and knowing (Piper, 2015). Several elements characterize Piper’s work within the indexical present: her use of direct address, a focus on interpersonal dynamics, and a confrontation of oppressive modes of perception, such as those that bolster racist and sexist ideologies.

For example, in the installation *Four Intruders plus Alarm Systems*, Piper (1980) displayed four large images of black men’s faces, illuminated by light boxes located behind their eyes to create the impression that they are staring directly at their viewers. Beneath each light box is a set of headphones that plays one of four monologues that Piper wrote and recorded to mimic four racist discourses she had identified — aestheticizing, liberal, appropriating, and overtly racist. The liberal response included statements such as, “I’m antagonized by the hostility of this piece... the artist is

representing all blacks as hostile and alienated... It's just not true that all blacks are hostile and alienated," while the aestheticizing speaker attempted to distance themselves from their own responses to the piece using the discourse of art criticism, making claims such as, "I suppose this is an interesting attempt to disrupt my composure as an art viewer... but I'm not convinced it's that effective as art." Each monologue mixes with the soundtrack of War's "Night People," a song that describes racist fears of black people by both commenting on and mimicking the ideas that support these fears, similarly to the methods that Piper employs in her monologues. In cultivating this experience, Piper invited her audience to consider their own processes of reacting to the images of black men and the ideas articulated in the racist discourses she put on display. As she has explained, while people's reactions to this piece were determined by their own particular experiences, in the case that they heard similarities to their own ideas presented within racist discourse, Piper (1993) hopes that these viewers "experienced a guilty shock of identification, and then a distancing, and maybe [a sense of] 'Is this the way I'm really thinking about things?'" In providing opportunities for this kind of reflection, she has clarified that "essentially, these pieces are an attempt to ask people to position themselves relative to a discourse in our society about race [that] is clearly inadequate."

As Piper's explanation of her work's purpose indicates, her interest in working with and in the indexical present stems from her understanding of it as a mode of potential transformation, and also because she posits it as a pedagogical site in which it is possible to confront and initiate change in the viewer. In one sense, this transformation is personal to her, as is evident in her description of how racism and sexism have been

impactful in her own life, and her attempts to better understand and address how these experiences have emerged in and through her art. She has claimed, “The way art-making works for me is that it enables me to synthesize and process my own experience in the world as a social being” (1993). Piper's description here aligns with the potential for art to function as a process through which transformative, anti-oppressive learning can unfold. At the same time that Piper positions her work as pedagogical for her audience, she also explains that through it, she also teaches herself. Just as hooks (1994) and Kumashiro (2000) explain anti-oppressive education as transformational for both students and educators, Piper demonstrates how it is possible to operationalize these dynamics vis-à-vis creative processes.

Furthering her analysis of her work as a conduit for transformation, Piper has described her intention of addressing her audience within the indexical present as a means of initiating change. Within the experience that her audience has while attempting to make sense of their own relationship to the stances she proposes, Piper claims that she, as an artist, has the potential to initiate a process that will work within a viewer, perhaps even at a subconscious level, to change oppressive beliefs and behaviors they may harbor. By pinpointing and responding to moments in which racism and xenophobia manifest concretely and interpersonally, Piper leverages her creative works in the interest of initiating change as well as the eventual elimination of those oppressions. She frames the internal adjustments her work elicits as operating outside of her audience's rational capacities; rather, she believes that confrontation and catalysis within the indexical

present can initiate transformations of which the viewer is not rationally aware or in control.

As Piper insinuates, she intends her work in the indexical present to pinpoint processes of racism and xenophobia as they manifest in people's attitudes toward others, obscuring the uniqueness and specificity of individuals as well as their capacity to understand and relate to each another. Within this framework, Piper (1992/1996a) enables a consideration of institutional oppression as ultimately replicated and present within individual relationships (p. 257). Her focus on the present is at once to pinpoint these processes, to imagine the potential for a world without them, and to initiate the changes necessary for making this world come into being. In this way, Piper's framework overlaps with the pedagogical strategies described by Sara, Finn, and myself. In emphasizing observation and experimentation as modes through which to seek out and specify troubling dynamics and practices, Piper demonstrates the kind of interventions that Sara, Finn, and I both attempt to emulate ourselves and also facilitate for and alongside our students.

In facilitating interactions through her works, Piper invites viewers to reflect on their own perspectives in relation to existing ideas about difference and injustice. The strategy of highlighting stances — by mimicking them, displaying them as objects, and asking her viewers to consider their own — allows Piper to initiate a process of reflection that is specific to each viewer. She explains:

The fact that I depict a stance in my work shows only that there is a stance from which I am depicting it. It doesn't require me to identify that stance with one particular group, because in my view that would be an instance of the very

mistake that I'm trying to fight against... It is not really designed for any particular audience — it is an object that anyone can position themselves in relation to. (1993)

In delinking available sociopolitical stances from the people who take them, Piper highlights that the potential of her work exists in the meaning that her audience makes of it, and it is not up to her to predetermine what that will be for specific people. For example, in the introduction of her monologue in *Cornered* (1988), a piece in which Piper speaks to the audience from a television set placed behind an overturned table and below two of her father's birth certificates indicating different racial identities, Piper explains, "I'm black. Now let's deal with this social fact and the fact of my stating it together." For the rest of the monologue, Piper ponders what it means for both her and her viewers to consider the politics of racial identification. For her, using first person to facilitate this conversation "makes clear that [Piper] means to be talking at least about [herself] but not at most about [herself]" and that the politics of race and racism involve other people just as much as they involve her (1993).

Through her work in the indexical present, Piper is able to identify stylistic elements that lend themselves to creating a political intervention and providing the possibility for social change. Reviewing the modes upon which Piper draws in her work, Berger (1999a) describes the shift from the "Minimalist-Conceptual forms and devices of [Piper's] earlier pieces... to an art that would be resolutely conscious of the place, sensitivities, and vulnerabilities of the spectator" (p. 17). Throughout this change, Berger explains that Piper explored the Minimalist-Conceptualist conventions of "dismantling the traditional boundaries between object and viewer — the elimination of pedestals,

frames, fragile or precious materials, and sometimes even the object itself” (p. 20).

Piper’s challenging of these boundaries is particularly clear in her use of strategies that privilege directness (e.g. eye contact and direct address) to initiate critical reflection within her viewers. As she explains, in many of her works, “the gaze is frontal and makes eye contact with the viewer, and the textual mode of address is the ‘I/You’ first and second person, a device I’ve been using since the early 1970s in order to build intimacy and confrontational immediacy” (Berger, 1990/1999b, p. 230). She frames the ways in which she presents the personal in her work as an extension of this mode, since “The personal plays the role of the concrete, immediate, and specific. I want to give concreteness to my work to blast the simplistic categories we impose on people. I use my own experience — my own selfhood — when it seems strategically the best way to make concrete those thoughts, sentiment, or beliefs that might be dismissed as being too theoretical or abstract” (Berger, 1990/1999b, p. 230 - 231).

Artworks

Though the indexical present is Piper’s idea, the overall concept, as well as the way she employs particular strategies in relation to the purpose of her work, also exists in the work of other artists, students, and educators. Specifically, the idea of pinpointing an incident and inviting viewers into reflection and conversation around the dynamics connected to and within it can be a useful strategy to employ when exploring the possibility for facilitating a greater sense of justice within sociopolitical conditions. Conceived in this way, the indexical present can be a pedagogical mode for both artists and those working in more conventionally educational settings. For the sake of exploring

the possibilities that working in the indexical present can present, I examine particular works of the following artists: Emma Sulkowicz, Regina José Galindo, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and arts collective Gran Fury. Sulkowicz performed a piece called *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight* from the fall of 2014 to the spring of 2015, during her senior year at Columbia University. During the performance, Sulkowicz carried an extra-long twin sized mattress with her anytime she was on Columbia's campus. She set the following rules of engagement:

1. Whenever I am on Columbia University (CU) property, I must have the mattress with me.
2. When I am inside a CU-owned building, the mattress must be inside the building as well.
3. I may not seek help carrying the mattress. However if someone offers either to help me carry the mattress or carry it for me on their own accord, I can accept their aid.
4. When heading from a location owned by CU to a location that isn't owned by CU, I must leave the mattress in a safe place on campus.
5. When heading from a location not owned by CU to a location owned by CU, I must first collect the mattress from wherever I left it previously. (Sulkowicz, 2014-15).

Sulkowicz spoke publicly about the context for the performance, which was her experience with sexual assault by another Columbia student, in her own dorm room at Columbia, and the subsequent mishandling of the case she pursued through Columbia's administration (Davis, 2014; Dusenbery, 2014; Edwards, 2014). Sulkowicz also clarified that the duration of her performance was to be determined by either her rapist's expulsion from school or her own graduation. The performance received significant media attention at its beginning as well as at Sulkowicz's graduation, when she did carry the mattress across stage with the help of several other Columbia students who had been instrumental

in advocating for sexual assault survivors during the 2014-15 academic year (Taylor, 2015).

Regina José Galindo's work *¿Quién Puede Borrar las Huellas? (Who Can Erase the Traces?)* also involves the element of walking to implicate personal, corporeal, and institutional violences. In her performance, Galindo walked from the Congress of Guatemala building to the National Palace, dipping her bare feet at intervals in a white basin full of human blood as a response to the announcement of the presidential candidacy of José Efraín Ríos Montt, a military figure who staged a coup in 1982 and under whose subsequent rule 200,000 people were murdered or went missing during the 1960-66 Guatemalan Civil War. At the end of her performance, Galindo left the basin of blood in front of guards on the steps of the National Palace and washed her feet in a fountain across the street (Galindo, 2006). The piece received both national and international attention around the time of its performance.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles performed a series of what she titled "Maintenance Works" from the late 1960s through the early 1980s. In them, she explored the potentials of re-framing "maintenance acts" typically associated with unpaid or underpaid work as art performances. In her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969!*, she spoke to the ways in which maintenance work is often marginalized and rendered invisible by the very institutions that rely on them; she also proposed an exhibition through which she would highlight maintenance acts as a way to explore their visibility to the public (Ukeles, 1969). In the summer of 1973, she performed several actions at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut. These performances, which Ukeles

did during the museum's open hours, included such actions as washing the interior and exterior of the museum, locking doors for specified periods of time, and cleaning art displays (Ukeles, 1998).

Gran Fury was a collective of artists who worked with and alongside New York City activist group AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) in the late 1980s and early 1990s to spread awareness about the AIDS epidemic itself as well as U.S. government and media negligence and misrepresentation surrounding infection and treatment. Named for the car model used by the New York City police department at the time, the group utilized an array of techniques, often borrowing advertising aesthetics and displaying their ads on public billboards and as street art. Their objective was consistently to bolster ACT-UP's messages about the importance of increased funding for HIV/AIDS research, de-stigmatizing the illness and its treatment, and critiquing public figures who perpetuated silence and inaction around the disease (Gran Fury, et al., 2011; Speretta, et al., 2014).

Like Piper, each of these artists utilized particular methods to draw attention to qualities of present moments, and to help their audiences to consider those moments as microcosms of more expansive and repeated inequities. Piper characterizes the overall objective of her methods as being to build "intimacy and confrontational immediacy" (Berger, 1990/1999b, p. 230) with the intention of generating catalysis, or the induction of change in her viewers (Piper, 1989/1996a, p. 219). Since these elements of intimacy, immediacy, confrontation, and catalysis are key components of working within the indexical present, I examine each theme within the works of the artists above. My hope is

that by doing so, I might illuminate diverse ways in which each element can lend itself to strategic action and impact. In other words, my interest in the particular pieces I have chosen to consider is in looking at what each artist is doing, how they are doing it, and how, using the indexical present as a conceptual guide, educators and students can learn to see how their projects can function as forms of transformational pedagogy.

Intimacy

The element of intimacy within the indexical present manifests in Piper's work as qualities and methods that place an emphasis on interpersonal dynamics and exchanges. Piper (1989/1996a) describes how her creative work "tends to target interpersonal manifestations of racism rather than institutional ones" since she believes that:

Institutions are composed of individuals, and that institutional manifestations of racism are composed of interpersonal ones: the off-color remark, the anxiety response at the mere presence of an ethnic and cultural other, the failure of empathy with an other that causes insensitivity, the failure of imagination and self-awareness that elicits the imposition of inappropriate stereotypes and xenophobic behavior in response to them. The atomic, interpersonal level of individual transactions is the most elemental, personal level at which blacks learn from whites that they are unwelcome in mainstream society, so this is the level at which I try to attack racism. (p. 246)

In other words, Piper is concerned with how the overarching, macro levels of oppression (racism and xenophobia in particular), emerge within quick, one-on-one dynamics; furthermore, she sees the interpersonal expressions of these processes as opportunities for intervention at an intimate level. As oppression is intimately manifested, Piper explores ways in which to address those manifestations intimately as well. In order to do so, she

approaches instances such as those she mentions above with a curiosity about opportunities to initiate reflection and change.

Piper's interest in intimacy as an element of the indexical present is two-fold: as a quality through which oppressions are enacted, and also as an element to utilize strategically when confronting, refusing, and reconfiguring those enactments. For example, in works such as *My Calling (Card) #1: A Reactive Guerrilla Performance for Dinners and Cocktail Parties* (1986-90) and *My Calling (Card) #2: A Reactive Guerrilla Performance for Bars and Discos* (1986-90), Piper gave pre-printed cards to people who said racist things in her company at dinner parties, or who refused to respect her boundaries at bars and discos. Piper had experienced each exchange often enough to have prepared a response in advance, which she printed on cards and gave to people who made racist or sexist remarks in each context. She also made copies of the cards available for viewers to take when viewing her work in exhibit form, thus directly enabling viewers to participate in their own interventions. These performances highlight the element of intimacy because they involve Piper delivering a card directly to the person who made oppressive remarks. Since the surrounding context involves more people than just Piper and the card's recipient, her act of delivering it to them highlights an intimate exchange — the delivery of the card is just for the recipient, which marks their exchange as particular in relation to their surroundings. Furthermore, the text of each card utilizes direct address and emphasizes the card's recipient as "you" and Piper as "I". In giving the card, Piper employs the framework of an interpersonal conversation to initiate a pedagogical dynamic between her and her recipients.

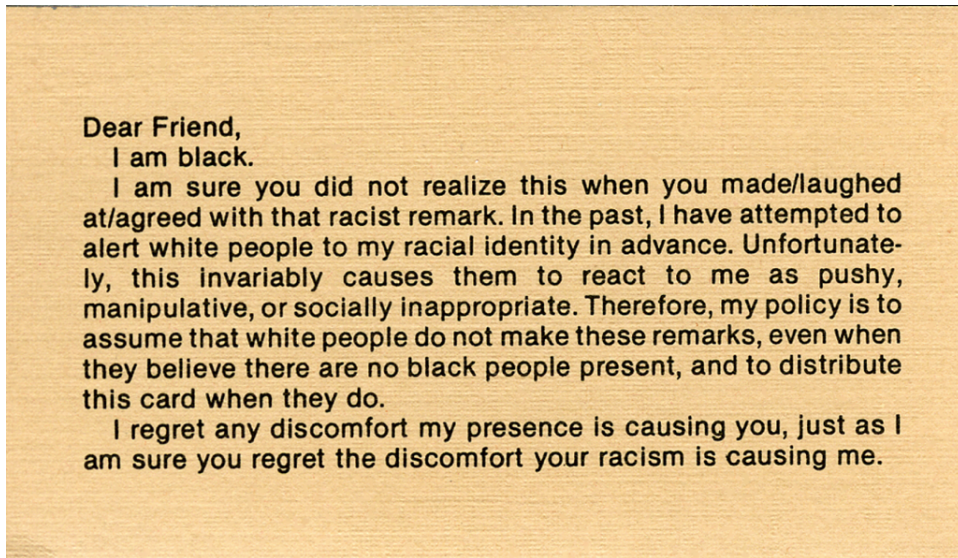


Figure 5. *My Calling (Card) # 1*



Figure 6. *My Calling (Card) # 1 and # 2*

While performing, she utilizes intimate elements of close proximity and direct address strategically, infusing the scope of her interactions with a quality that may make it more difficult for recipients to easily assume a more distanced stance.

Piper's use of intimacy as closeness, proximity, and exchange between individuals resonates in varying nuances and degrees in the projects of each of the artists within this chapter. As I see it, Piper's mode of intimacy is interpersonal, one-on-one, and close-up. It involves giving and exchanging, probing expressions and responses, using direct address and mimicry, and seeking to shift or speak to elements that exist in her audience's internal life — the beliefs or knowledge that they may not always express, but that impact their actions and their attitudes toward others. From these elements, I see two themes emerge concerning the ways that artists work with the idea of intimacy: intimate publics, and proximity. I highlight these two themes because I see them within the works of these artists, and also because they seem worthwhile for educators to ponder in organizing curriculum with the intent of inviting students to become strategic in the ways that they engage with their own surroundings. By highlighting these themes within the work of these artists, I hope to offer them as possibilities for teachers and students to experiment with as well.

Intimate Publics

In *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight* (2014-15), Sulkowicz's ongoing struggle with carrying a mattress, an object that references intimacy both in general and also in the specific context of the impetus for her piece, echoed her own experience of sexual assault on her dorm room mattress. In carrying a mattress out of her bedroom,

between buildings on Columbia's campus, and to class, Sulkowicz both confounded strict boundaries between public and private and also framed an intimate experience — the trauma of her sexual assault — in a broader social context. In describing these elements of her work, she explained, "We keep [beds] in our bedroom, which is our intimate and private space... The past year or so of my life has been really marked by telling people what happened in that most intimate, private space and bringing it out into the light" (Dusenbery, 2014). Sulkowicz's act of bringing her mattress out into the public not only indexes her experience of the assault itself, but also represents the way she has continually brought her story out into the public by raising her case with Columbia's administration and disciplinary board, undergoing sexual assault hearings at the university, reporting her rape to the police, and speaking about it to the media.

Her public performance continually referenced trauma in a way that aligned with Piper's description of intimacy: as interpersonal, of close proximity, and involving an exchange (albeit a violent one) between people; at the same time, Sulkowicz challenged the idea that intimately experience violence should remain private. In carrying her mattress and making the context of her performance known, she also implicated ideas and systems that prefer silence and invisibility in matters of sexual assault. As she explained, "the act of bringing something private and intimate out into public mirrors the way my life has been" (Van Syckle, 2014). Particularly since Sulkowicz made it public knowledge that her assault occurred on a mattress in her own Columbia dorm room, her actions of continually carrying the site of her trauma did not dilute its intimacy. Rather,

her actions created an agitation around the way that her intimate trauma registered in public, and in particular on Columbia's campus as the site of her performance.

In other words, Sulkowicz's mattress remained a signifier of intimacy even when its context shifted; in removing it from "private" space, Sulkowicz experimented with the possibility of cultivating an intimate public. As Edwards (2014) explains, "By quite literally bringing the site of the crime (in this case an ostensibly "safe" domestic space) into public sight, Sulkowicz's performance relocates its subject in between the shifting grounds of public and private, personal and political" (para. 2). As the location of Sulkowicz and her mattress shifted, so did the intimate context. By relocating the mattress from place to place, Sulkowicz highlighted the ways in which intimate trauma is indeed, not private, but both experienced within and perpetuated by liminal and public spaces and dynamics.

Like *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight*, artist collective Gran Fury's work also challenged forms of violence that, while experienced intimately, also have a pervasive public life. Also like Sulkowicz's piece, Gran Fury was concerned with the ways in which institutions (such as the U.S. Government, and the FDA specifically) can be complicit in enacting violence in the intimate realms of people's lives, as well as the ways in which social attitudes can obscure the role of institutions and relegate experiences of violence to a "private" domain. Throughout their interventions, Gran Fury used the subjects of their work interventions — bodily infection and the physical proximity that can cause it (e.g. exchange of bodily fluids through sexual, medical, and/or intravenous drug interactions), as well as limitations to access of effective medical

treatments — to simultaneously reference intimacy and experiment with ways to call attention to public silencing of the AIDS epidemic. For example, when the collective designed public ads such as *Kissing Doesn't Kill* (1989) to address misconceptions about the cause of HIV/AIDS, they not only addressed the misinformed idea that kissing spreads the virus, but also did so within public space, thus rendering the intimacy attributed to ideas about HIV/AIDS widely viewable via the context in which they were displayed.



Figure 7. *Kissing Doesn't Kill* Bus Poster

The ad functions as both a play on the idea of public displays of affection and also an indictment of the ways in which public institutions of media and government often remained silent about the AIDS crisis. Like Sulkowicz's and Gran Fury's work, Regina José Galindo's 2003 performance, *¿Quién Puede Borrar las Huellas? (Who Can Erase the Traces?)*, referenced intimacy in the connotations it shares with bodily trauma while also indexing the role of institutions in perpetuating oppression. As Galindo has explained, within this performance, her body functioned "not as an individual body but as a social body, a collective body, a global body. To be or reflect through me, her, his or others experience; because all of us are ourselves and at the same time we are others" (Rodrigues, 2011). In employing her body as a metaphor for many other people living in Guatemala who had experienced the violence and fear associated with Montt's abuse of power (Carolin, 2011), Galindo represented state-enacted violence as publicly intimate. In using her body to trouble the violence enabled by institutional power and corruption, she used a corporeal, vulnerable referent to signal connections between her performance and the broader context in which violence is not always so socially visible. Like Sulkowicz and Gran Fury, the tactics she employed are enabled within her "proximity to and consequent identification with the realities to which her work refers" (Carolin, 2011, p. 214).

The symbolism of Galindo's bloody footprints and the ways in which they reference experiences beyond her own corporeality bear similarities to Gran Fury's (1988a) *Bloody Hands*, a piece directed at New York City public officials for underreporting the number of AIDS cases and hence cutting funding for treatment.

Organized as a combination of performance and direct action, ACT UP protesters dipped their hands in red paint and left “bloody” handprints throughout New York City on objects available on the street, such as mailboxes and the sides of buildings. Along with the handprints, protesters also wheat-pasted posters designed by Gran Fury that included a red handprint and the copy “You’ve got blood on your hands, Ed Koch. NYC AIDS care doesn’t exist” (Gran Fury, 2011, p. 30). While Gran Fury’s project is perhaps more didactic than Galindo’s, both use intimate symbols associated with bodily trauma to stand in for and also to indict broader forms of institutional violence. Furthermore, they, along with Sulkowicz, map intimate traumas onto and within the landscape of public spaces.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles also referenced intimacy in the context informing her work. Framed by her accompanying manifesto, her “maintenance art” involves bringing “private” forms of work out into the public. In her proposal for the maintenance art exhibition, “CARE”, Ukeles (1969) stated, “I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also, (up to now separately), I ‘do’ Art. Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art” (p. 146). Her explanation and her performance highlighted the processes that render “public” and “private” as sites in which particular work exists.

As these artist demonstrate, exploring the idea of intimate publics can function in many ways: to address and draw attention to silencing tactics, to provide new points of education around and access to issues previously determined to be “private”, and to trouble the boundary between private and public in relation to experiences of oppression.

Each of these functions are available to educators and students to experiment with as they attempt to facilitate greater awareness and agency around their own anti-oppressive efforts.

Proximity

Proximity is another element that characterizes Piper's work in the indexical present. In her Calling Card performances, the act of giving the card to someone enacting racist and/or sexist discourse involved Piper initiating close proximity with someone causing her discomfort. In *Four Intruders Plus Alarm Systems*, she invites each audience member close enough to hear her approximation of a particular racist discourse (perhaps even one that they share). Sulkowicz, Gran Fury, and Galindo demonstrate several other ways to utilize the element of proximity.

For example, intimate proximity comes into play in the ways others interact with Sulkowicz's work in *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight*. In the terms of engagement she set for the piece, Sulkowicz specified that although she would not ask for help from others, she would accept offers of assistance in carrying the mattress. During the performance, when people did offer their physical support, the mechanics of the piece determined that they had to assume an intimate proximity to Sulkowicz in order to help her carry the weight. Furthermore, if they were aware of the context of her piece, they were also becoming proximate to her trauma and lending both physical and also symbolic support to Sulkowicz in her process of coping with and reflecting on the trauma she had experienced.

Her parameters resulted in various enactments of proximity throughout the 9 months of the performance: in some cases, friends and colleagues organized schedules for people to sign up to help Sulkowicz carry the mattress, in others, people offering their help actually made the act of carrying more difficult. Sulkowicz described:

I think people, even when they're trying to be helpful, [can] have some difficulty understanding boundaries. If I'm carrying the mattress by myself and someone just jumps in and helps me, they actually are knocking me off balance because if they jump up behind me and push the mattress up, they actually are throwing it over me and I've dropped it a few times, just because they don't understand that you need to communicate... this is the language of consent — that they need to communicate with me before they jump in and help. (Brooklyn Museum, 2014).

As Sulkowicz insinuates, the performance illuminated the ways in which offers of physical support and negotiations of intimate proximity are not universally benevolent. Through the criteria she determined, Sulkowicz invited passersby to engage with the ambiguous dynamics of intimate proximity and to consider how best to support her in sharing the weight she bore. In this way, the performance itself revolved around the potential of multiple dynamics that can emerge from intimate proximity: boundary violations and confusion as well as support, coping, and perhaps healing.

While Sulkowicz's piece invited others to consider and negotiate intimate proximity knowingly, Gran Fury's (1989b) *New York Crimes* offered an example in which proximity is a surprise element. Frustrated with the lack of adequate media coverage of the AIDS crisis, the collective designed a page of news stories reporting on conditions for HIV positive inmates, inadequate healthcare available for those living with HIV/AIDS, and the general lack of reporting on HIV/AIDS related issues. After

researching the delivery schedules for the New York Times, the collective followed the morning paper route and replaced the first page of the Times with their own front page. In making use of the aesthetics and sites often associated with the individual consumption of reading the daily news, Gran Fury's project interacted with their viewers on an intimate level — one in which the audience may be expecting to consume information “privately” (as dictated by the implicit assumption that consumerism is an individual choice rather than an expression of broader public systems), but found themselves interpellated into a public discourse about health and power.

Unlike Gran Fury's larger scale billboard projects, the *New York Crimes* functioned on an level that seems intimate in scope. While billboards are available to a large number of people at once, and the reception of the message on billboards is informed by this broad purview, newspapers offer a more proximate relationship with ideas, since newspaper readers hold the paper close to themselves while they read, and the scope of the encounter is typically between the reader and the paper. Intimate proximity figures as a notable quality of the site, particularly considering the ways in which the projects attempts to disrupt the status quo, or, as Kwon (2002) explains, to render “discomposure between the art work and its site” (p. 75). While newspapers, especially big ones like the *Times* obviously have a wider readership, the present moment in which a reader extracts a newspaper from a newspaper stand to read it involves an intimate formation — one in which the scope of the encounter may seem smaller, and also one in which the reader is prepared to receive a particular (factual) form of information. As Gran Fury artist Tom Kalin described the planning and execution of the

New York Crimes, the group “became more interested in an individual address instead of the collective address of a billboard, which had more street currency — people saw it more than once. But the *Crimes* changed my mind because we had all of this dense information you could take home and read” (Gran Fury, 2011, p. 26). As Kalin notes, the context for the encounter with a billboard versus an encounter with a newspaper is different, and while both may serve educational purposes, the social expectations and patterns that readers bring into their relationships with newspapers inform their interactions with the information presented there. Inasmuch, regardless of whether readers might have realized that the *Crimes* was or was not the *Times*, the piece presented factual information that nonetheless took place on intimate terms. While consumers might already approach billboards with a degree of skepticism (as they are, after all, trying to sell products), the trust that readers are likely to place in the established news sources as factual may predispose them, as readers, to consider information that appears there seriously.

A work that explores a similar dimension of intimate proximity with its viewers is an announcement that Gran Fury placed in the program for the 1988 Bessie's, an awards ceremony for dance and performance in New York City (see Figure 8). As with *Crimes* project, the program announcement borrowed from the aesthetics of ceremony programs, using a font, layout, and other typographical elements common to the form. The piece invites the audience to consider their own relationship with AIDS in terms of time (the duration of the program), as well as space (the specific site of the awards ceremony), and finally, their own capacity for action.

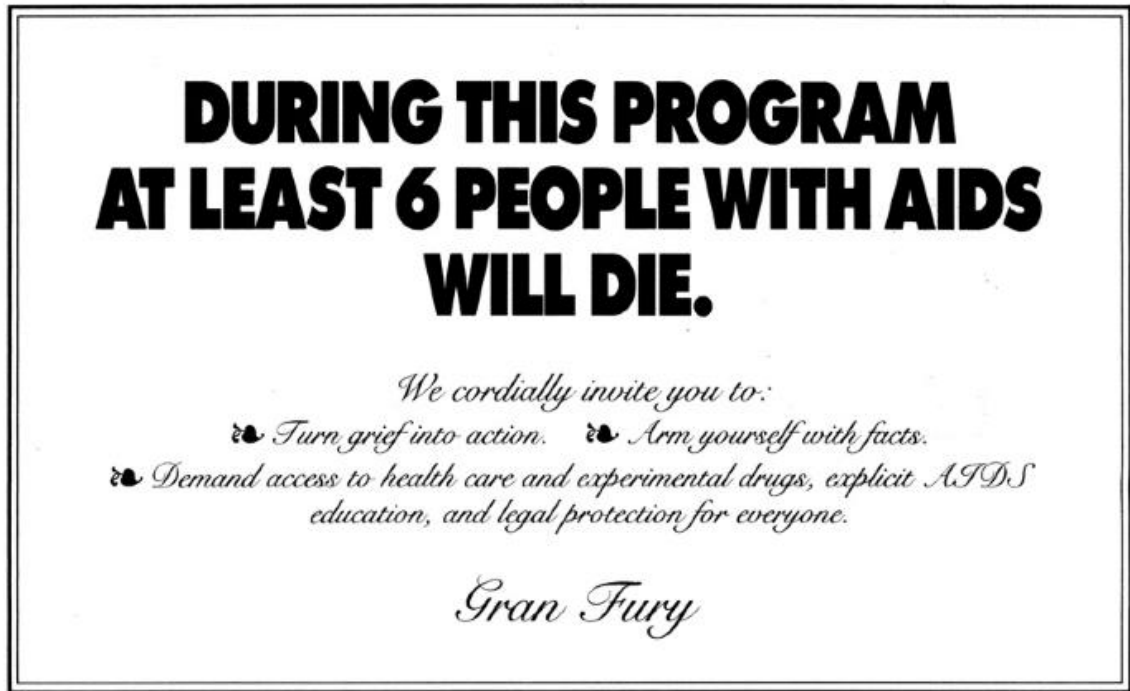


Figure 8. Bessie's Award Program Advertisement

The wording and appearance of the announcement directly implicate the reader in relation to the AIDS crisis as well as the actions taking place to address it. By placing the viewer in intimate proximity to the effects of AIDS, Gran Fury attempted not only to close the distance their audience may have felt between themselves and AIDS-related deaths, but also to bring people into closer proximity with their own agency to realize change.

Immediacy

In addition to intimacy, another element that characterizes the indexical present is immediacy, or a quality of directness in terms of both time and materiality. As Piper (Berger 1990/1999b) explains:

The personal plays the role of the concrete, immediate, and specific. I want to give concreteness to my work in order to blast the simplistic categories that we impose on people. I use my own experience — my own selfhood — when it seems strategically the best way to make concrete those thoughts, sentiments, or beliefs that might be dismissed as being too theoretical or abstract. (p. 97)

According to Piper, immediacy can be a helpful element to leverage in creative efforts to illuminate and shift damaging ideologies such as racism and xenophobia, particularly if and when those ideologies might seem abstract and/or removed to some viewers.

Immediacy helps to locate the viewer and the work in the same space and time, and to experience their own role in relation to oppressive systems as concretely as possible.

While Piper describes employing her own particular selfhood as a way to reference immediacy, she also uses techniques of mimicry to facilitate direct encounters with discourses that her audience may have heard or even spoken themselves. For example, in the monologues she recorded for *Four Intruders Plus Alarm Systems* (1980), Piper articulates what she imagines viewers might be thinking in the moment they encounter the installation, thus creating an environment in which they potentially share time and space with an external representation of their own thinking. While abstract and theoretical elements are clearly still present in this work, Piper's use of the "concrete, immediate, and specific" can provide a means for her viewers to make connections between immediacy and abstraction as well as a way to consider the ways in which they are co-implicated and co-present. A range of approaches in relation to immediacy and selfhood are available in the works I have examined so far.

Direct Focus

A particular strategy that draws upon the idea of immediacy is commanding or directing the viewer's focus to a specific object or idea. Artists who employ this mode often explain their work as compelled by a sense of urgency and emphasize dynamics that occur in the now, at the exact moment of their performance. Put otherwise, this idea involves artists facilitating encounters in which they ask for direct focus, much like a snap to attention. Gran Fury's (1988c) Bessie's program piece provides a clear example of the possibilities involved in this kind of creative intervention. As I explained above, this piece involves an intimate proximity with the viewer — that is, the collective designed it to be experienced in a mode of physical and mental closeness. This mode works in tandem with the qualities of directness (e.g. direct address, invitation to act) within the piece that compel its viewers to engage with their political awareness in an exact moment. Issued in a tone of urgency, the program employs its readers to think about the time that they will spend at the awards show and to link this time to the number of deaths that AIDS-related illnesses will claim. In this way, the magnitude of the crisis becomes concrete through the element of shared time — while the attendees sit in the awards show, Gran Fury states, six people will die of AIDS. Although the attendees may not share physical proximity with those dying, the piece asks its audience to consider time as an element that connects them directly to their surrounding political context and the capacity they have to shape it.

While shared time functions as one way to draw direct focus to an issue or idea, shared or related embodiments can serve as another referent and anchor to an immediate

moment of a performance. Fisher (1999) theorizes that Piper works to “expose and disarm [the racist] gaze by deflecting visuality into other modalities [such as] the immediacy of the bodily encounter” (Fisher, 1999, p. 40). In Fisher’s description, Piper’s consideration of bodies (both her own and her audience’s) within the moment of a performance can provide another way to direct attention to a specific dynamic or occurrence. Rather than proceeding according to known scripts of racism and xenophobia, Piper’s audience has a chance to experience a re-orientation vis-à-vis the bodily experience to which Piper directs them as a different way of knowing — one in which they disengage (even momentarily) with the dominant ideologies that shape their knowledge production and make space for new ways of understanding the moment at hand. For example, Galindo used her body to respond to the immediate situation of Ríos Montt’s presidential candidacy. She explained, “What I wanted to do was make a painting all over the city that created a visual record of the trajectory of the bloody footprints. I wanted to go from the Constitutional Court, which is where Ríos Montt was at the time, to the National Palace, which is where he wanted to go” (Latin American-Canadian Art Projects, 2014).⁶ While using her body to draw attention to the violence of political corruption, Galindo also provided a new orientation for expressing protest, and observed new possibilities for expressing dissent. Despite the power of the military enforced on the day that Montt announced his candidacy, Galindo observed that “the

⁶ Galindo’s interviews are in Spanish. For the purposes of quotation, I have used the English interpretation.

policemen and the military let me do [the performance]. They never stopped me or asked what I was doing” (Latin American-Canadian Art Projects, 2014).

For both Galindo and Gran Fury, the urgent political context of their work likely informed the decision to employ immediacy within their methods and to craft direct focus with their message. During the 1980s, when the exponential rise of HIV infection rates in the U.S. were often met with silence and inaction from the government and media, the rapid spread of disease presented an urgency in which “artists began to feel the necessity of joining forces with one another, the better to address the emergency” (Speretta, et al., 2014, p. 8). In other words, Gran Fury and other groups advocating for better public awareness and more attention to the treatment and cure of the disease sensed an urgency within the purpose of their work, and so their work took on the quality of immediacy. Pieces such as the Bessie's program addressed the present climate and drew attention to the ways in which immediate attention was necessary to curb the spread of disease and provide adequate health care to those impacted by it. Notably, a broader scope of addressing the marginalization of those impacted by the disease was also present, but the messages that Gran Fury and AIDS activists at the time relayed were not directly about ending homophobia or capitalism — rather, they addressed a narrower set of interests within those broader goals.

Extended Experience

While the pieces above focus on crafting interventions within or in relation to a relatively brief period of time, it is also possible for artists to highlight direct experience in a sustained sense. For example, Sulkowicz engaged immediacy in an ongoing sense in

both the physical work of *Mattress Performance: Carry That Weight* and the terms of engagement she set for it. Within the parameters of the piece, each moment that she carried the mattress aligned with a moment that the Columbia administration continued to let Sulkowicz's rapist attend school with her. The oddness, exhaustion, and stamina involved in the ongoing action of carrying the mattress correlated with these qualities as part of the continual condition of being made to attend a university that failed to believe survivors of sexual assault or protect them from the trauma of being made to bear close proximity to the people who have assaulted them. Sulkowicz's emphasis on struggle as both immediately present and also relentless reflects a specific engagement with endurance and the duration of time as an element within her work. The element of time becomes particularly pronounced given Sulkowicz's use and treatment of other materials such as the mattress, which she explains not wanting to fetishize as an object by using "tricks" such as ropes or wheels to carry it around (Brooklyn Museum, 2014). By eliminating the use of other materials from the outset of the piece, Sulkowicz delimited an emphasis on her relationship with the mattress itself in the context of the sites she carried it for the duration of her performance.

Notably, much of the initial media coverage of *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight* mentioned the duration of the piece, but sometimes under-explored the implications of its extended duration. Many articles (e.g. The Washington Post (Kaplan, 2014), Rolling Stone (Nathanson, 2014), re-use the same set of photographs taken on a day early on in Sulkowicz's performance — she is wearing the same pair of clothes and carrying the mattress in bright, sunshiny September weather. In an interview from

December of that same year, she described having to cover the mattress with waterproof materials for when it is raining, and the need to acquire gloves because of the cold (Brooklyn Museum, 2014). Even though the immediacy of the performance and all that it represents was ongoing, this element also went un or under explored in the ways in which activist groups on campus took up mattress carries as a symbolic act. For example, though one might argue that duration is a key element of the performance, activist groups on college campuses often replicated the action of mattress carries for a shorter period of time, such as an afternoon, or for a particular campus event. While these events do replicate the visual spectacle of carrying mattresses in public, they invoke the quality of immediacy much differently; while the image of Sulkowicz or other students carrying mattresses creates a certain visual effect and carries particular messages, Sulkowicz's insistence on carrying the mattress for a prolonged period suggests that immediacy can extend beyond quick moments. In rendering immediacy within an ongoing passage of time, Sulkowicz highlighted the effects of sexual assault and the university's negligence in relation to it as constantly present.

Like Sulkowicz, Gran Fury and ACT UP also utilized strategies that emphasized the ongoing nature of oppressive conditions to draw attention to the institutions responsible for causing them. Foster (2003) describes how the die-ins staged by ACT UP unfolded in such a way that the "cycles of bodies dying underscored the magnitude and urgency of the AIDS crisis by staging its effects as seemingly never ending" (p. 404). By orchestrating die-ins, or protests in which participants fell to the ground in public places to symbolize those dying of AIDS, ACT UP members were able to use their own bodies

to demonstrate the ways in which the AIDS crisis sustained an ongoing impact.

Importantly, Gran Fury often worked with ACT UP to provide additional context for these actions. For example, the copy for the Bloody Hands action read, “THE GOVERNMENT HAS BLOOD ON ITS HANDS: ONE AIDS DEATH EVERY HALF HOUR” (1988a). Copy for an ad from the same year reads: “The U.S. Government considers the 42,000 dead from AIDS expendable. Aren’t the ‘right’ people dying? Is this medical apartheid?” (Gran Fury, 1988b).



Figure 9. Gran Fury Subway Advertisement

Artifacts such as these supplement the performances staged by ACT UP — in addition to providing context, their physical duration lasts longer than a die-in. Employing these multiple strategies while also making constant references to immediacy generates a sense that the crisis is an ongoing part of public life, and that institutions such as the U.S. government should be held accountable for their responsibility to protect the people who live within its purview.

While Sulkowicz and Gran Fury broke away from the patterns of everyday life to emphasize an extended experience with oppression, Mierle Laderman Ukeles borrowed from the repertoire of acts she was already performing to highlight the ways in which dominant codes obscure maintenance work. In her *Maintenance Manifesto* (1969), she described maintenance as a constant and ongoing process — the duration of which is often not visible. In her proposal for her maintenance performances, she explained that she hoped to “flush... maintenance everyday things... up to consciousness [by] exhibit[ing] them as Art” (Ukeles 1969, p. 146). It is through the naming of maintenance actions as art that Ukeles rendered their extended immediacy and highlighted the ways in which they are always already present in both “domestic” contexts as well as “public” institutions such as art museums. In recoding maintenance acts as art, Ukeles not only highlighted the ways in which they are always already happening but also put into critical perspective ideas and practices that made them less legible at any given time. While Ukeles’s performances themselves lasted less than a day (in *Washing / Tracks / Maintenance: Outside* (1973b) she washed stairs of the marble entrance to The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art for four hours, and in *Washing / Tracks /*

Maintenance: Inside (1973a) she washed the marble floor of Avery Court for another four hours), her actions referenced labor that occurs constantly. Through the visibility of her performances, she provided a referent for her audience to consider both the ongoing nature of maintenance as well as why maintenance acts are so often rendered less visible or invisible to them.

In both the use of immediacy to garner direct focus and to facilitate consideration of extended experience, artists experiment with the ways in which it is possible to utilize time to raise questions and prompt thought. While Piper frames this potential in terms of the present, Derrida (1978) refers to the impossibility of marking the present moment, claiming that in the marking, the moment is gone. If Derrida's suggestion is that marking the present is impossible, I want to suggest that instead of regarding the immediate moment as markable in any absolute sense, perhaps the idea of immediacy that Piper references in her description of the indexical present could provide a way to think about the possibility of gesturing toward time as an entry point or a shared quality between a creator and their audience, rather than claiming to mark the immediate as a way of indexing an absolute truth. Regarded as malleable and relational rather than essential and fixed, perhaps the qualities associated with immediacy — directness, concreteness, now-ness — can offer a sort of palate for creators (artists, teachers, and students included) to consider when figuring out how to facilitate inquiry around the possibility of anti-oppressive action.

Confrontation

Piper intentionally involves confrontation as an element of her methodology within the indexical present, employing such techniques as direct eye contact, frontal gaze, and direct address to target and elicit defensiveness within viewers who might be harboring racist and/or sexist ideas. These devices are clear in pieces I have already discussed, such as such as the *Calling Cards*, *Four Intruders with Alarm Systems*, and *Cornered*. In the latter, Piper uses confrontation to address white people's fear of miscegenation, blackness, and otherness. In employing direct address and eye contact, she facilitates a conversation between herself and the viewer in which it seems as though they are confronting her with their views on race and identity at the same time that she is confronting them. In facilitating this dynamic, Piper explains that she attempts to "force the viewer through a psychological process; once [they] are confronted with these emotions and ideas, [they] must in some way come to terms with them" (Berger 1990/1999b, p. 79). Piper's description of confrontation highlights a paradox of her work in the indexical present — that confrontation, whether it produces alienation or not, can co-exist with intimacy. In Piper's description, she explicitly builds toward confrontational intimacy by cultivating artworks that "target defense mechanisms," of her viewers, and in doing so, generates the possibility of a heightened and "more sophisticated self-awareness" in them (Piper, 1989/1996a, p. 249). Confrontation, according to her framework, is not the same as transformation, though it can precede it and function, perhaps surprisingly, as a meaningful form of connection between creators and their audiences.

Implicating

Considering how each of these artists employs the element of confrontation in their works, it is helpful to think back to Piper's description of the indexical present as "the present you can point to with your index finger" (1993). In this formulation, confrontation is the act of pointing. It is the quality or action that most directly implicates the institutions, systems, and people who are the recipients or subjects of each artist's critique. In each of the creative works I have mentioned, the confrontation that the artist is issuing is both specific and broad. For example, Sulkowicz's implicated Columbia University specifically by positioning the duration of her performance as contingent on Columbia's decision to either expel her rapist or to allow him to continue to attend the same school as her. While her work targets broad cultural norms that blame, isolate, and fail to provide for the safety or healing of survivors of sexual assault in general, Sulkowicz's implication of Columbia specifically is an intrinsic part of her performance, determining, among other things, the site-specificity of her work. Explaining her decision to delimit the scope of her performance to the Columbia campus, Sulkowicz said, "If I were to carry this piece all around New York City, it would be about homelessness" but that carrying the mattress on campus made it more specific to the doubled set of injuries she experienced at the hands of her assailant as well as the ineffective university justice systems that allowed him to remain on campus, despite extensive evidence that he presented a danger to Sulkowicz and others who brought complaints against him (2014, Brooklyn Museum).



Figure 10. *Mattress Performance: Carry That Weight Rules of Engagement*

While Sulkowicz utilizes performance to implicate the particular institution of Columbia, Ukeles provides an example of how to use performance to implicate oppressive systems generically. Through her maintenance performances, she intentionally confronted the devaluing of maintenance work and the alienation that late capitalist structures produce between materials, labor, and art. She framed this work in relation to general cultural understandings of maintenance, which include, but are not exclusive to institutions such as the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, where she staged several of her works. Her work functioned, in one respect, as a critique of the minimalist movement that rendered the labor involved in producing the materials less visible, or in many cases, obscured them entirely in the interest of a focus on the artist and the

material. While Ukeles indicted arts institutions for marginalizing the maintenance work upon which they rely, she also implicated standards within these institutions that place rigid standards around what work counts as art. In *Maintenance Art*, her critique exists not only in the performance, but also in the agency that she asserts through her accompanying manifesto when she wrote, “Everything I say is art is art. Everything I do is art is art” (1969, Ukeles).

In the case of both specific and generic confrontations, Sulkowicz and Ukeles employed particular tactics in the act of pointing to a problem; notably, enacting these confrontations involved a considerable amount of research about not only what people, processes, or institutions to confront, but also how to confront them. The specificity afforded by Piper’s indexical present can help creators to think about figuring out exactly where to point, how to point, and how to get others to follow the lead of the pointing — elements with which each of these artists grappled in developing their works. For example, Gran Fury’s work involved understanding and negotiating the complex dynamics between social stigmas, political legislation, and access to resources. In implicating the U.S. government for allowing AIDS research to go underfunded and in underreporting cases of HIV / AIDS, Gran Fury (in collaboration with ACT UP) demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the complex set of institutional dynamics that presented justifications for underfunding HIV/AIDS treatment and public misconceptions of the scope of the epidemic.

Irritating

Another mode of confrontation creators can employ is to create an irritation to the systems or situations they would like to see transformed — to make a nuisance of themselves in some way or another. In a 1990 interview with Robert Gober, Gran Fury explained their use of public art as a form of this mode of confrontation, claiming, “We do not only act as an irritant, we also point to what’s going on in society at large... Our main beef isn’t with the art world, it’s with the United States government’s lack of response and the political crisis that underlies the medical crisis of AIDS” (Gran Fury, 2011, p. 12). These dual strategies of irritating oppressive systems while also educating the public about them is evident in the 1987 action *Wall Street Money*, in which Gran Fury designed currency for ACT UP members to use to disrupt trading in the Wall Street stock exchange. Photocopied from actual currency on one side, the back of the bills included messages urging their recipients to consider the relationship of the HIV/AIDS crisis to the pharmaceutical companies who were monopolizing treatment options and making them inaccessible to many people who needed them. As Gran Fury member Marlene McCarty explained:

All these ACT-UP boys got dressed up in nice suits, nice shoes and fancy leather briefcases. They stuffed the briefcases with the Gran Fury Money. In those days there wasn’t any security so they could go in the Mezzanine. So they went on the Mezzanine and when they clanged the bell to start trading, they dumped all the briefcases on money on the trading floor. It was kind of fabulous because it stopped trading. The *New York Times* picked up the story not because of the messages but because it stopped trading. But they had to report on why. Within six to eight weeks, the AZT was lowered in price. It had a real effect on people. (Colucci, 2012).



Figure 11. *Wall Street Money Currency*

This action functioned as an irritant in that it altered the status quo of the stock exchange; at the same time, it created space for education and reflection on the particular issue of HIV/AIDS treatment where that space had previously not existed. In this way, it not only agitated oppressive systems but also generated conditions in which new possibilities and connections could be considered and enacted.

Galindo's (2003) performance in *¿Quién Puede Borrar las Huellas?* (*Who Can Erase the Traces?*) also employed the strategy of leaving artifacts in a particular site as a way to confront powerful institutions and corruption within them. In describing her

motivations for making the piece, Galindo (2014) explained, “It emerged from rage and fear. When it was announced that Efraín Ríos Montt had managed to win acceptance as a presidential candidate... I suffered an attack of panic and depression... I decided then and there that I would take to the streets with my shout and amplify it. I had to do it” (Latin American-Canadian Art Projects). Like Gran Fury, Galindo describes her motivation as arising from a need to address injustice directly. Furthermore, the imagery she created through her performance worked as an explicit irritant to the Guatemalan government for allowing and enabling Montt’s bid for presidency. In leaving her bloody footprints behind, Galindo confronted them with a decision: either to clean up the blood or not — either way, their actions became visible as violent. The terms of Galindo’s performance are especially meaningful in the context of the title *Who **Can** Erase the Traces?*, since this wording implies the power in the ability to erase. Whereas Gran Fury’s *Wall Street Money* action leveraged a certain element of legibility by increasing the visibility of suppressed ideas, Galindo’s work highlighted a dialectical relationship between herself and the institutions she confronted. In other words, she involved the institution she challenged within the performance itself, and their actions extend the poetics of her gesture. In the works of both Galindo and Gran Fury, as well as campus activists organizing with and alongside Sulkowicz on the National Day of Action,⁷ leaving objects in close proximity to those in power, simultaneously created irritation to

⁷ Student activists designated October 29th, 2014 the “National Day of Action,” in which the invited students from around the country to join collective mattress carries. Students at Columbia marched 28 mattresses (one for every Columbia student who had signed a Title IX complaint against the university regarding its procedure for handling sexual assault cases) to the president’s house and left them on his lawn.

authority while also exercising the autonomy and resistance of the artists and activists themselves.

In addition to employing inanimate artifacts such as paper, mattresses, and basins within their confrontations, each of these artists also involved their bodies as an irritating force to the systems they critiqued. As Rodrigues (2011) explains, Galindo's "body is not the end of any given performance but becomes a device for enabling tactics of transversalism, facilitating connections between history and contemporaneity, artist and audience, public space and art space" (p. 301). Likewise, Gran Fury, Sulkowicz, and Ukeles each employed the presence of their bodies in particular sites as a way to draw attention to dynamics or practices that they found troubling and worthy of further public consideration. Similar to the die-ins that Gran Fury supported vis-à-vis ACT UP, Galindo made violence visible via representation of its bodily forms. Since her performance involved actual human blood, she evoked particularly disturbing connotations while also using her own body as a way of drawing attention to all of the bodies that the state has violated, as well as all of the people who continue to live in pain and fear for their safety.

Another element these artists sometimes incorporate to amplify the scope of the irritation they attempt to cause is their relationships with the media. This tactic is clear in Gran Fury actions such as *Wall Street Money*, in which the collective designed fake currency with the intention of providing information to the media, and in which the action itself was orchestrated in part to catch media attention. Foster (2003) makes the argument that Gran Fury was consistently strategic the ways in which they (along with ACT UP) employed the media to spread their message:

Convinced that media should be cultivated and even managed as part of their protests, ACT UP activists orchestrated each action to emphasize its visual punch... ACT UP's policy of attracting and using media to broadcast its message reflected its view that the media functions not as pure documentation but as a social force that sways public opinion, and hence, must be manipulated. (p. 405)

Acting as an accomplice to ACT-UP actions, Gran Fury's employment of advertising aesthetics provided those engaging in direct actions with catchy slogans and arresting visuals that made for effective media sound-bites. Their mode of confrontation, then, ran on a spectrum between overt and subtle, almost appropriative forms of confrontation. In the case of the Crimes, they literally substituted their message in for the status quo, while in *Bloody Hands* they used violent imagery to represent the violence that the state was already enacting on the public by not providing adequate funding or fair treatment of a dire public health issue. In other cases, such as the *New York Crimes* action, the collective confronted the media itself for neglecting to report adequately or responsibly on the AIDS crisis.

Catalysis

Piper describes catalysis as the transformation she hopes to initiate by cultivating intimacy, immediacy, and confrontation within the indexical present. She describes this transformation as operating on a potentially subconscious level, as the process of being impacted by and processing psychologically challenging events does not always directly correlate to an exact transformation, but it can facilitate changes nonetheless. She sees her art as an opportunity to facilitate events that might later contribute to personal change within her viewers. She explains:

At some psychological level, everything we experience gets stored and affects the way we experience the world in the future. When I have confrontational interactions, I go through the process I described. The experience does its work for a long time afterwards. As the ripples smooth out, my behavior is changed in certain ways — even if I don't credit the unpleasant, shaming, or disturbing experience that is at the root. The next time I'm in a comparable situation, my behavior will be more fine-tuned and I will be better able to respond in a sensitive and considerate way. That is the point at which, psychologically, I can allow the process of self-scrutiny to go on at a conscious level. The entire catalytic process takes longer for some people than for others. (Berger, 1998, p. 219).

For Piper, the point of exploring the elements of intimacy, immediacy, and confrontation within the indexical present are all in the interest of eliciting a change within her viewers. She claims:

My work springs from a belief that we are transformed — and occasionally reformed — by immediate experience, independently of our abstract evaluations of it and despite our attempts to resist it. Because my creative commitment is inherently political, I am primarily motivated to do the work I do by a desire to effect concrete, positive, internal political change in the viewer, independently of — or in spite of — the viewer's abstract aesthetic evaluation of my work. (Piper, 1989/1996a, p. 247-8).

This framework is distinct from a utopian one, in which artists employ creativity to imagine a kind of world that could exist but has yet to become actualized. Rather, Piper's method and framework pinpoint the dynamism and specificity of a moment, and in pointing it out, gesture toward the way it could shift. Rather than envisioning the change, artists like Piper who operate within this mode reflect the dynamics of oppression back to the viewers themselves and place the impetus for transformation upon them, trusting at times that transformation may occur in undetectable and indescribable ways.

Piper links the process of change that she hopes to elicit through her work to responses that are not necessarily possibly to identify. Her hope is that by interacting with her works, “Change [can be] effected in a person pretty much irrespective of the rational forms of evaluating the experience” (Berger, 1990/1999b, p. 80). Within this understanding exist two notable elements: the idea that the realization of change can be delayed long after its initiation, and the idea that it may not always be possible to note or measure the ways in which change has occurred, even with knowledge of its catalyst.

Delayed Effects, Imprecise Outcomes

As Piper describes, change can occur over a period of time and in a way that the person experiencing it may not even be able to attribute to the catalyzing event. She creates her work with this delay in mind, hoping to initiate change, but not expecting that change to occur quickly or even in a way that she can ultimately confirm. This work is similar to the process of education itself, in which students and teachers can be gradually transformed by the educational process. As with education, artists and creators can set out to have different levels of intentionality and expectations around the element of delay. For example, Gran Fury’s *New York Crimes* piece enabled people to take information about HIV/AIDS with them, to absorb these potentially new ideas into their understanding of public health, and to attempt to reconcile the difference between the *Crimes* stories and those that typically appeared (or didn’t appear) in the actual *New York Times*. All of these effects played out beyond the direct purview of the artists themselves, making the outcomes difficult if not impossible to directly measure or trace.

The framework for Ukeles's maintenance performances provides another opportunity to think about how artists can take the capacity for transformation into account while constructing their work. Ukeles (1969) confronted the standards of contemporary art institutions that obscure the maintenance work upon which they rely, such as childcare, garbage disposal, and other work that is repetitive, monotonous, and necessary to uphold the status quo. She explained, "Conceptual & Process art, especially, claims pure development and change, yet employs almost purely maintenance processes" and proposed that through the exhibition of her maintenance performances, she would "zero in on pure maintenance, exhibit it as contemporary art, and yield, by utter opposition, clarity of issues" (p. 145). She did not delineate exactly how her performance would generate this change in understanding, yet she did clearly engineer the exhibit with the purpose of transformation in mind. Perhaps this implication aligns with Piper's idea that by presenting a particular set of actions within a carefully considered context, the work of figuring out how to reconcile or make sense of creative pieces then falls to the viewers, and that in many cases, the artist has the capacity to set up these circumstances so that the potential for transformation emerges within the audience as they subconsciously continue to consider what they have experienced.

Utilizing these strategies that bank on delayed impact doesn't mean that there isn't a sense of urgency around the issues that artists are addressing, but rather that they are aware that transformations sometimes occur unseen and unheard, unfolding in their own time. Furthermore, even in pieces such as *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight* and *Wall Street Money* that articulate very clear demands for change, the way that those

pieces play out can and did have impacts beyond amplifying these primary demands. The activism that sprung up alongside and around *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight*, for example, demonstrates the effect of group empowerment that superseded Sulkowicz's own requests of the university, as well as her original framing of her performance as primarily a work of art and a form of personal coping with and reflection upon the trauma she had experienced (Dusenbery, 2014). In the porous relationship that *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight* came to share with the anti-rape campus activism that arose alongside it (e.g. through student organizations and advocacy events), many groups took up the mattress as a symbol of personal experiences with sexual assault and universities' mishandling of sexual assault cases. Though, as I mentioned previously, the way other students negotiated the symbol of the mattress was not the same as Sulkowicz's performance, and though these collective carries lasted a much shorter period of time, the symbolism of other people carrying mattresses both referenced and exceeded Sulkowicz's original intentions. While Sulkowicz has not reported conceiving her piece as an extension of campus activism, her project clearly did function as a way in which survivors and their advocates were able to raise visibility around their experiences with violence and demands for change. These dynamics illuminate the ways in which outcomes may be unforeseen in addition to being imprecise.

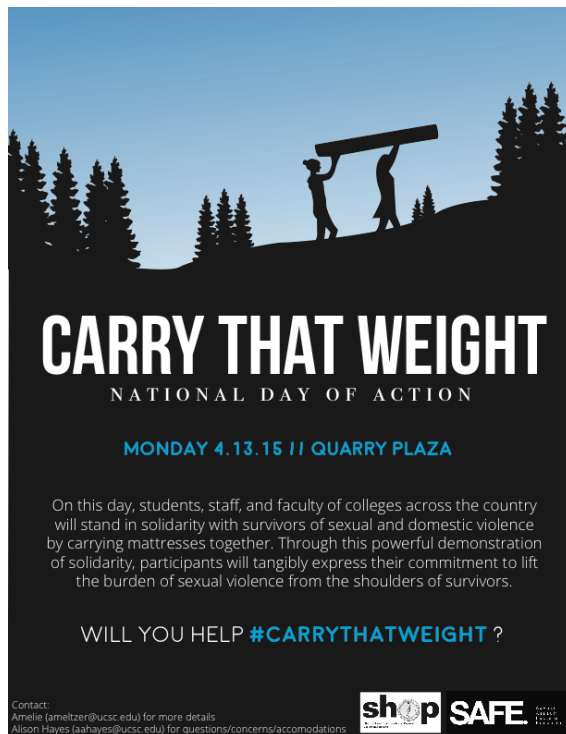


Figure 12. National Day of Action Poster, University of California Santa Cruz

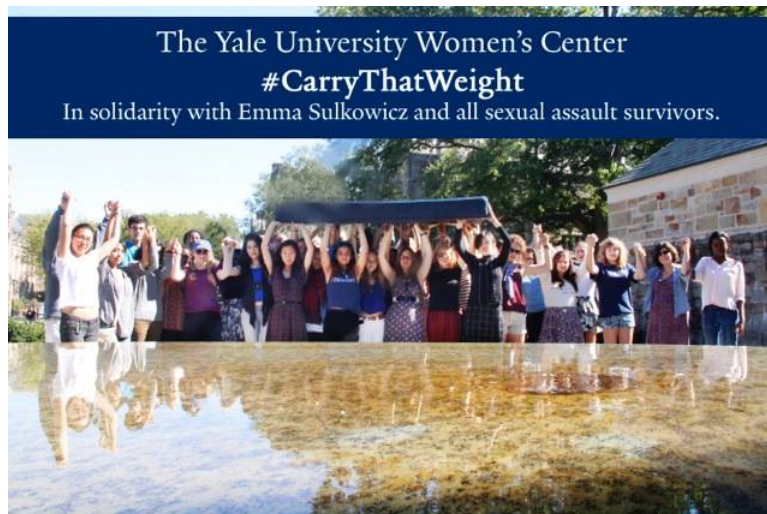


Figure 13. Yale University Poster

While Piper is very explicit in the ways in which she intends to change people on a personal and social level through her art, other artists frame their ideas and work in ways that are sometimes incongruous to Piper's almost pragmatic approach. Galindo, for example, distinguishes her work from activism because, unlike activism, she notes, her work is "not even getting close to offering solutions to problems" (Escorza, 2009). If Galindo's work occupies a part of the artistic spectrum that functions more as indictment of institutional violence than alternatives or suggestions to alter it, Sulkowicz's work exists in an in-between space, in which, while she repeatedly claims that her work is not a protest, it does exist in a close and porous relationship with activism and protests it inspires. Gran Fury's work lives in a space even more explicitly imbricated in activist and protest work, demonstrating the ways in which art can serve the interest of protest by providing slogans, visuals, public performances, and even, as evident in the case of their "Art is Not Enough" poster, self-critique. This variety of relationships to formal, or explicitly named "activism" demonstrates the ways in which creative approaches to realizing social change can occupy a range of approaches and even degrees of ambiguity to protest politics.

Both Emma and Gran Fury's work often have a specific set of demands — e.g. to "get my rapist off campus" (Grasdalen, 2014) or to increase funding for and expediency of HIV treatment, and they use their art to issue those demands to institutions. In both cases, the art both represents social issues and specific demands, while also referencing a broader political context. Whether or not the demands are specifically met or not, each artist juggles the task of articulating their demands with the particular actions and effects

that they attempt to generate. As Sulkowicz (Grasdalen, 2014) explained early on during her performance:

You come up with an idea, you set it in motion, and then whatever comes after that, is sort of the life of the piece. So I don't really, personally, have some preconceived notion of where I want the piece to go, and I just believe that wherever it ends up going, is where it was meant to end. (para. 16).

Conclusion

Ultimately, the concept of the indexical present offers a flexible set of tactics and approaches through which to both consider and address oppression. In this chapter, I have identified qualities of creative works and strategies that artists have employed in the interest of generating transformations in particular sociopolitical moments. My hope in emphasizing each mode of engagement has been to highlight particular concepts or methods that are not only useful to these artists, but could also be useful to teachers and students as they consider how to better understand and engage with the world around them. Piper's indexical present offers a vantage point from and through which strategies might emerge for students to observe and experiment, as Sara, Finn, and I discussed is so important when learning to understand and expand their own ideas about systemic oppression and the roles they play within it. While intimacy, immediacy, confrontation, and catalysis are certainly not the only concepts through which to address issues of injustice, they can provide rich points of entry for grappling with personal relationships to oppression as they manifests in concrete and specific, yet also ephemeral and enduring moments and places. In offering ways to engage with the world through the lens these ideas provide, pedagogy inspired by the indexical present can provoke inquiry about

personal complicities with and investments into upholding oppressive practices, but can also suggest new possibilities for shifting, disrupting, and transforming those practices (at however immediate or specific a level) into something more humanizing and just. As students and educators navigate dynamics of dis/comfort in the pursuit of critical inquiry, having access to specific (and perhaps unexpected) concepts to help them delve more deeply into their understandings of power and marginalization can provide a valuable dimension of pedagogy. As I imagine it, these dimensions of the indexical present (or even the conceptualization of the indexical present itself) can serve as potential sites from which students could launch and also on which they might land. For students attempting to understand what they can do to operationalize their ideas about oppression, artists such as Galindo, Sulkowicz, Ukeles, and Gran Fury provide clear examples of how to explore critical questions through a process of actions (from which analysis itself is never absent). In considering the decisions, actions, strategies, and materials these artists employ, it is possible for both educators and students to imagine how they might operationalize the questions they have about power and oppression in their own lives through their own creative processes. My hope is that in doing so, both students and educators might become more invested in their own capacities to interrogate, agitate, and inquire.

CHAPTER IV

THE CURRICULAR POTENTIAL OF THE TRACE

Within pedagogical discourse, there is a particular weight given to the idea of “teachable moments” — those circumstances that bubble up to the surface in a classroom and present themselves within student comments, behaviors, or other occurrences that, though perhaps unforeseen, emerge as rich opportunities for learning. Educators often speak of the importance of seizing upon teachable moments, particularly because they present opportunities to meet students where they are and to facilitate their learning in ways that help them to better understand the dynamics of their immediate environments. Sara and Finn both located these moments as one of the primary conduits through which they can reflect anti-oppressive frameworks in their classes. In being attentive to dynamics that present themselves in the form of who speaks more, who feels entitled to touch whose hair, or who is inclined to address harmful behavior even if not directed at them, Sara and Finn engage in pedagogies that are similar to the sensibility that Piper described through the indexical present. Cowhey (2008) shares a similar anecdote about a time when student conversations about the best way to deal with black ants at snack time provided an opening for an entire unit on diverse spiritual beliefs and practices. Tolentino (2011) describes another moment that arose when a class discussion about the novel *The Secret Life of Bees* presented an opportunity to discuss racial dynamics and white privilege within the specific context of her classroom. Both stories demonstrate the

possibilities that can unfold when educators are willing to balance responsiveness to present moments with their overall intentions and plans.

A willingness on the part of educators to understand and meet their students where they are (and where they have the potential to be) involves continual sensitivity to what counts as a particularly rich or pivotal moment for learning, what it means to be aware of the time and space that students and educators share, and how students themselves might experience lessons on power and privilege. While Piper's approach to the initiating these discussions invests in the changes the people can undergo and elicit by privileging immediacy and specificity, there are also other ways to approach and regard connections between lived experience and anti-oppressive frameworks. Derrida (1976, 1978) posits a markedly different set of strategies under his claim that the idea of a specifiable present itself is somewhat of a fiction, as what one might call the present is constantly haunted by potential futures and pasts. Given Derrida's interests in understanding language as neither a container of truth nor a tool by which to reveal knowledge absolutely, a study of power involves considering how it works within and through systems of language (Bradley, 2008; Wolfreys, 2007). Rather than attempting to discern knowledge or truth inherent in language, Derrida proposed that “any apparently singular, ‘present’ and independent sign necessarily contains within it the traces of other signs within the system against which it is to be defined” (Bradley, 2008, p. 66). In the interest of exploring how this philosophical troubling of presence might engender opportunities for learning that students and educators could pursue, I consider how artists experiment with various possibilities for intervention, expression, and inquiry inspired by

Derrida's (1976) concept of trace, an idea he articulates in *Of Grammatology*. As Spivak explains in her preface to this volume:

Derrida suggests that what opens the possibility of thought is not merely the question of being, but also the never-annulled difference from 'the completely other.' Such is the strange 'being' of the sign: half of it always 'not there' and the other half always 'not that.' The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent. (p. xvii)

Rather than offering a definitive explanation of the idea of trace, Derrida employs it as a way to consider the relation that ideas and their expressions can have within broader systems of meaning, as well as to hint at the way in which those relations and systems are dynamic, fluid, and politically charged. For the purposes of informing a pedagogy that prioritizes process then, the trace can function as both a touchstone and a strategy by and through which to consider those relations as well as to assess what circumstances, usages, and modes of thought determine them at various points in time. In thinking about pedagogy through and alongside the idea of trace, I explore a series of processes that, rather than rely on the concepts of a graspable, specifiable present, move in a direction inspired by ideas and expressions that are complex, layered, and sensitive to the terms by which meaning is both determined and contested.

Derrida (1976) describes attempts to determine knowledge and construct meaning as always multiple, layered, contextual, and haunted by other histories and contexts. When interpretation of knowledge seems, or is presented as immediate or complete, Derrida argues that many more possibilities for understanding exist, and that the act of

foreclosing these possibilities is at once always an exercise of power and also retains the potential to be undone, or done differently. He explains:

The instituted trace is 'unmotivated' but not capricious. Like the word 'arbitrary' according to Saussure, it 'should not imply that the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker' (p. ioi) [pp. 68-69]. Simply, it has no 'natural attachment' to the signified within reality. For us, the rupture of that 'natural attachment' puts in question the idea of naturalness rather than that of attachment. (p. 46)

Put simply, the trace presents not a way to uncover the "true" meaning that pre-exists other meanings, but to consider the ways in which meaning is constructed at all. If one takes these constructions into account, it can then become valuable praxis to pause, revisit, and reconsider many possible meanings. This approach was important to Derrida as a way to contest Western philosophical traditions that understand "human history as a goal-directed, or 'teleological' movements in stages from a primitive, or 'savage' animal origin towards an ideal, fully human, end of man and end of history to come" (Glendinning, 2011, p.34). Particularly in the sense that the traditions that Derrida engaged often depend upon binary framings of concepts such as humanity and time, he reveals an interest in opening up and recognizing the possibility for new understandings that acknowledge, but do not reinforce or rely upon ethnocentric underpinnings. In the context of these efforts, the idea of trace can help to keep conclusions open, or at least to frame them as always contingent and in-absolute. This practice becomes especially important to entertain in the context of empiricism and the "truths" people have proposed within its name that advance the interests of those in power to the detriment of those that they marginalize.

Although Derrida describes the trace as a noun, he infers that it can also function as a verb, which can refer to a mode of inscription and reinscription as well as the act of exploring the ambiguities and presences of the multiplicity that is always already present within systems of communication. Considered in this way, trace is a means by which to think about the relationship that ideas have to one another, as well as how they are bound up in one another — the thought being that ideas (or representations of them) only have meaning in relation to one another. Derrida's work offers a framework through which to become attentive to what is both always and already present in the way that any person understands and/or engages with the world around them (as well as what governs their sense of interiority or self-hood). Derrida's idea of trace involves revisiting and becoming observant to what exists and how it continues to exist, what inherited ideas are present in thought and expressions of it (e.g. language) (Glendinning, 2011, p. 18-19), as well as how ideas continue to be constructed within and through language. Wolfreys (2007) explains that, in terms of the expression of ideas in and through language:

The signifier is always a trace, never the thing, concept, idea, reality or whatever is not the trace or mark. That apparent unity of the sign — saying I or I am for example — only has its possibility therefore through the play of the trace. (p. 69, *italics original*)

In other words, expressions of language are not directly or innately connected to that which they are expressing; rather, they echo and approximate that to which they refer, and within this process, move within and draw upon contexts that exist in relation to the objects or ideas they reference.

According to this framework, the concept represented by “the trace” always exists within expression as a fluid and malleable presence. As a methodology, “tracing” can function as a repeated meditation through which to resist the calcification of ideas while also taking history and context into account. Working with the trace as the inspiration for a conceptual framework involves considering what has come before any given expression, as well as how contemporary concepts and associations relate. Understanding the concept as the presence of what has come before (a trace leftover) and the action of re-inscribing previous material, even with a difference, (as in “to trace”) involves developing a working knowledge of the relationship between the past, present, and future.

Whereas in the previous chapter, I explored themes and strategies borrowed from and inspired by Piper’s framework of the indexical present, in this chapter I focus on a theoretical framework offered and inspired by Derrida’s idea of the trace — elements and processes of play, contingency, and repetition, as well as the unforeseeable and inexact qualities involved in troubling objectivity, empiricism, and claims of complete knowability (Spivak, 1976, p. xix, lvii). Creative potentials afforded by an investigation of the idea of trace are not opposite of those within the indexical present, nor are they necessarily commensurable; rather, they each provide ways to notice and describe elements in the particular artworks I have chosen to discuss, as well as to consider the pedagogical potential offered by the modes of engagement artists demonstrate in making them. While the indexical present is characterized by directness and other qualities that attempt to minimize the degree to which experience is mediated, the idea of the trace

offers a framework for considering how any attempt to describe ideas or experiences is always already mediated, and because of this, there is room to both play with and consider the dynamics already involved in qualities and processes of mediation. While the mode of the indexical present can facilitate various modes of and paths to confrontation, the concept of trace can offer invitations to consider relationships between presence, absence, remoteness and proximity in any communicative effort. If working in the indexical present signals an investment in a rational and somewhat straightforward capacity to transform institutions by confronting the people within them, utilizing the trace as a conceptual lens enables creators to forefront inconsistencies and inexactness within any act of representation or expression. As Trinh (1999) explains, “When you let things resonate and approach them indirectly, you are opening up a space in which absence and presence never work as mere oppositions. So although you can’t be exhaustive and totalizing, you are not excluding either” (p. 38). This point is related to the ways in which I am considering trace because, as a concept and a process, it can illuminate how absence and presence can be coterminous, as Trinh alludes to in her explanation of resonance, which she explains allows her “to explore and develop the ability to speak to very different groups of people without having to name them all” (p. 37). So while directness is a quality that characterizes the indexical present, indirectness is more present as a creative and analytical mode in the way I will be exploring the trace. At the same time, attentiveness is also a part of considering trace, as related to the close reading practices that Derrida models and suggests in his works in and on deconstruction, in which he suggests proceeding with a strategy of reading “that produces rather than

protects... to dismantle the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work in [the text], not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way” (p. lxxv). According to this suggestion, thinking about the trace involves considering how meaning is determined in relation to the ideas that have come before, or are contained within any given sign, as well as what determines the boundaries of a sign within the ever shifting present.

A framework for considering creativity in artwork and pedagogy as offered and inspired by Derrida’s idea of the trace can highlight similar ideas as the indexical present, yet from differing vantage points and with different potential trajectories. As Glendinning (2011) explains, “Derrida identifies his ‘final intention’ in the work undertaken in *Of Grammatology* (but certainly not only there) to be ‘to make enigmatic’ what one thinks one understands by words like ‘immediacy’ or ‘proximity’ or ‘presence’” (p. 29, italics original). Overlaps with some of the key ideas and methods that Piper identifies within the indexical present are evident; yet while Piper relies upon immediacy, proximity, and presence to lend exactness and precision to her work, Derrida troubles the coupling of immediacy with understanding, and of instantaneousness with the seamless transmission of total meaning. While these questions may put the potential effectiveness of Piper’s strategies into question, they open up other modes of understanding and provide new perspectives on how to interrogate and work within systems of meaning in which oppression emerges and shifts in various reproductions of practices, ideas, and world-views.

In extending this idea of trace as a conceptual framework for considering creative works and the praxis they might lend to pedagogy and curriculum, I explore the nuances of “trace” in the following ways: as inscription, erasure, and play. In order to understand these ideas in relation to Derrida’s (1976) work, I include this quote that Spivak also cites in her translator’s preface:

The value of the transcendental arche (origin) must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased. The concept of the arche-trace must comply with both that necessity and that erasure... The trace is not only the disappearance of origin... it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme which would derive it from a presence or from an originary non-trace and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace or arche-trace (90, 61). (p. xviii)

My interpretation of Derrida’s explanation is that the trace inspires meditations about what makes expressive acts and or claims to knowledge possible at any and many points of time and understanding. Additionally, the suggestion to continually consider the relations of power within acts and modes of expression helps me to think about what limitations, marginalizations, and differentiating gestures are and have been at play. Finally, Derrida’s explanation inspires further rumination on the idea of play, or the relation between the inscription and the erasure present within expressive acts. As Spivak explains, “Derrida... is asking us to change certain habits of mind: the authority of the text is provisional, the origin is a trace; contradicting logic, we must learn to use and erase our language at the same time” (p. xviii). The challenge in both writing and reading the following schema, then, is to do so in a way that maintains the analysis as provisional.

Artworks

Within this chapter, I consider the idea of trace within and through the works of Tatyana Fazlalizadeh, Marlene NourbeSe Philip, Ana Mendieta, and Emma Sulkowicz. Each of these artists is invested in interrogating dominance, violence, and the conditions that enable them. By investigating these works in terms of the ideas that trace can offer, I discuss both the dimensions they explore and the methods they employ to do so. Considering these works alongside the idea of trace both helps and pushes me to think about the strategies involved in troubling violent narratives that can seem simplistic, true, and benign. As in the broader scope of this project, I investigate these works and methods as modes of and in relation to knowledge production, pedagogy, and curriculum.

To provide a bit more detail on the pieces I will be considering, *Zong!*, a book of poetry in which the author, Marlene NourbeSe Philip(2008) borrows language from a 1783 legal document in which the owners of a ship transporting enslaved African people to Jamaica in 1781 attempt to file for reimbursement with their insurers for damages to “cargo” (their designation for enslaved Africans) thrown overboard during the voyage. Through poetry and journal entries, Philip attempts to “tell the story which cannot be told” — a creative endeavor already marked by discourses that delimit its (im)possibility. *Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol* is a website with a video installation, written narrative, and open comment section that Emma Sulkowicz made available on the internet in June 2015 after the completion of her year-long work, *Mattress Performance: Carry That Weight*. The video depicts Sulkowicz and an anonymous actor engaged in a sexual encounter that becomes both violent and nonconsensual, as well as Sulkowicz’s performance of her

immediate response to this event. *Stop Telling Women to Smile* is Tatyana Fazlalizadeh's (2012-13) series of portraits captioned with selections from interviews she conducted with women about their experiences with street harassment. While she has exhibited these pieces in galleries, their primary mode of display is as street art wheat-pasted onto walls, lamp posts, and other surfaces alongside public streets. Ana Mendieta was a conceptual artist who worked in a variety of media in the 1970s and 80s. For this project, I focus on *Moffitt Building Piece* (1973a) and *Rape Scene* (1973b), which Mendieta performed while she was in graduate school at the University of Iowa, as well as her *Siluetas* series (1973-78), which extended beyond Mendieta's time as a student. In the first two pieces, Mendieta used materials such as blood and her body to explore social reactions to violence associated with domestic and intimate spaces. In the *Siluetas*, she traveled back and forth between Iowa and Mexico, creating a series of low-relief molds of her body in various landscapes.

In her *Stop Telling Women to Smile* series, Fazlalizadeh interviews women and draws their portraits in her studio, excerpts a phrase from each woman's interview to pair with her portrait, and displays both at potential locations of public street harassment. At each step of this process, multiple locations are present within one another — the studio carries the trace of the street and vice versa. The repetition of phrases such as "Don't call me baby" and "Stop telling women to smile" reproduced in writing on the street exists alongside and speaks back to iterations of street harassment. The portraits are traces of the women's bodies, while the quotes are traces of their spoken expression. While the responses certainly do not cancel out the harassment, they do trouble instances of it by

coexisting as modes of response. Wheat-pasted in locations open to public view, the portraits function like ghosts, reminding passersby of both the occurrence and impact of street harassment as well as the potential to respond to it.

Two of Mendieta's pieces I discuss are part of her response to the highly publicized rape and murder of Sarah Ann Ottens, a fellow student at the University of Iowa, where Mendieta was currently enrolled as a student. In *Rape Scene* (1973b), Mendieta made a durational performance in which she tied herself to a table in her apartment, smeared her body in cow's blood, and waited to be discovered by friends who came by. In *Moffitt Building Piece* (1973a), she arranged animal blood to appear as if it was seeping out from under the door of an apartment building, then filmed pedestrians responding to it as they walked by on the street outside. While there is considerable overlap between these two pieces in terms of the time Mendieta produced them, their use of animal blood, and their dealings with the boundaries between public and private space in relation to violence, the difference between the two is worth further consideration.

Bryan-Wilson (2013) asks:

What 'body' is on display in a piece like *Moffitt Building Piece*? It makes little sense to say of a work like this that it is about 'the body,' as if 'the body' were a stable or monolithic category that transcends all difference; the bodies here are multiple and situational, put to work in diverse capacities. Mendieta dismantles, dismembers, and decomposes the integrity of a singular 'body' by generating an array of corporeal forms, as well as by activating spectators whose bodies complete the circuit of viewing. (p. 27)

At the same time, it is possible to consider these same qualities in *Rape Scene*, in which Mendieta's performance and the role of an audience witnessing it also implicates other

violated and violating bodies (Bryan-Wilson, 2013, p. 29). Furthermore, both pieces function as traces of other violences — those they directly reference, such as the rape and murder of Otten (as well as the death of the animals whose blood Mendieta uses), those they echo and foretell (other violations that have occurred or could occur throughout time), and those that did not happen but had the potential to. On a pervasive level, Mendieta's performance also traces sociopolitical patterns that determine the conditions and possibilities for audiences of both pieces to respond in the ways that they did.

Mendieta made her *Siluetas* over a period of time (1973-78) as a series of performances, or “earth-body works” that invoke questions about time, audience, and the relationship of the artist’s body to the work itself (Viso, et al., 2004). It has been read by critics and scholars in a vast range of ways: as a feminist homage to an essentialized goddess figure (Bryan-Wilson, 2013), as a statement about Mendieta’s own exile from her home country of Cuba under political duress and at a young age (Quiroga, 2005), and in relation to other land art such as Richard Smithson’s (1970) *Spiral Jetty* and Richard Long’s (1972) *Walking a Line in Peru* (Perry, 2003), to name just a few. While some of these interpretations (particularly the earth goddess read) have been contested, it is interesting to note that something about the series in relation to shifting sociopolitical contexts made each interpretation possible, and this distinguishes the *Siluetas* from the previous two works, which have been read more directly in relation to the violent event that inspired them. I am interested in both this range of possible interpretations as well as in the elements of transformation, repetition, and liminality present in all of Mendieta’s performances I have mentioned.

Philip has described her work in the creation of *Zong!* as a “response to limitation of ‘facts’” (Saunders, 2008). In returning to the legal document that dismissed and “justified” the murders of African people aboard the slave ship *Zong*, and in treating that document as source material for creative work, Philip challenges the objectivity and neutrality associated with legal discourse by employing poetic language — language that is clearly subjective. Furthermore, she posits this challenge as particularly important in offering a corrective to the legal account. Philip’s book of poetry does not replace the legal document — rather, it contends with the narrative it offers and uses its own language to resuscitate the ghosts that haunt it.

Inscription

If Derrida’s idea of inscription provides a means by which to think about the process of writing as expression and of meaning-making that is always provisional, then this analysis also provides a means to think about how the process of expression is political. As Spivak (1976) explains in her translation of Derrida, “Knowledge is not a systematic tracking down of a truth that is hidden but may be found. It is rather the field ‘of freeplay, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble’” (p. xix). Understood in this way, inscription is not a revealing, absolute, or even “true” act, but rather, a choice that bears ties to both previous and future expressions. According to Derrida, writing is always an act of writing over something else, and the relations new inscriptions bear to previous ones are political rather than inherent. Inscriptions contain the potential, but not the guarantee, of awareness and

agency. Inasmuch, considering them and give insight into the production of knowledge, but not its absolute nature.

It is possible to look at several of the pieces I have chosen to consider in this chapter as modes of inscription. For example, in *Zong!*, Philip returns to written documents that inscribe the historical incidents of the slave trade and the laws enabling its practices. Her searching through and re-inscription of the layers of an event and documentation describing it draw attention to gaps within both, as well as their implications. When Mendieta produced her *Siluetas* series by creating, then leaving corporeal imprints on various urban and rural landscapes, she invoked questions about her/the body as a means of inscription. Fazlalizadeh's ventures onto city streets to leave wheat-pasted portraits of women also serve as a form of inscription in which, by delivering anti-harassment messages, she both traced past incidents of violence and left messages for and against those that could occur in the future. As these artists demonstrate, acts of inscription involve assessing the politics and potential of various sites according to both place and time. In cases such as *Zong!*, previous inscriptions are constantly visible in relation to what each new inscriber produces, and these layers impact the meanings of both sets of inscriptions. In others, such as Mendieta's *Rape Scene* and *Siluetas* series, as well as Fazlalizadeh's *Stop Telling Women To Smile*, the artist's new inscriptions highlight an alternative dimension or critique of a particular place.

To Repeat With a Difference

Trinh (1999) explains that one of the functions of repetition as a mode of production and/or analysis is “to emphasize something that may be lost otherwise, therefore drawing attention to the negligible, the unessential, the marginal. Another function is to fragment, because repetition can interrupt, hamper, or delay the flow of the narrative, event, or argument” (p. 44). According to this description, repetition is not exact duplication; rather, it can function simultaneously as both recuperation of and commentary on a preceding event.

This point bears pondering in relation to Philip’s methods of invoking collective memory that resist the dominant narrative present in the legal discourse of *Gregson v. Gilbert*. Philip’s treatment of the legal document that was the basis for this case involves strategic repetition — early on in the work, she uses only words from the document itself, and then later on, only letters from those words, to tell the story of the murders of African people aboard the ship. In re-inscribing violent events with fragments of the legal inscription that attempted to justify them, Philip seeks to recuperate the lives and deaths of the murdered Africans by revealing the trouble with the discourse that justified their victimization. As she explained in an interview with Saunders (2008):

There’s...a lot of repetition [in *Zong!*] which I was uncomfortable with at first until I understood what was happening, because each time a phrase or word repeats itself, it is doing so in a different context. This is signaling (or signing) a troubling aspect of the legacy of slavery — the repetitions of those of us who have been victims — and sometimes perpetrators — made manifest in our continued need to go over the same material time and time again, trying to find answers, trying to come up with different understandings of what this experience has been all about. (p. 74)

For Philip, the re-inscription of the story that the legal document does (not) tell represents a process for coming to different conclusions about both the story it tells and the magnitude of it as a form of inscription. In following the logic of the legal document itself, she finds gaps in both the narrative and its enabling context. It is from these gaps that she extrapolates her own narrative, exploding the original from within for not allowing a description of “cargo” as people, of throwing people overboard as murder.

Like Philip, Fazlalizadeh also returned to violent inscriptions as the inspiration for her work. However, while Philip authors re-inscriptions herself, Fazlalizadeh involves other participants in re-inscribing new possibilities. While Philip works at exposing the gaps within legal inscription and the violence those gaps enable, Fazlalizadeh amplifies responses that her participants offer to inscriptions of harassment in public space. As a work of re-inscription, her process involves the following elements: 1) documentation — conversations with women whose portraits she renders about their experiences with street harassment, and 2) installation — the practice of returning to public sites of harassment to leave these messages for past and future pedestrians. In speaking with her subjects about their experiences, Fazlalizadeh creates the opportunity for a critical revisiting of violent incidents — importantly, these conversations also mark the potential to build resilience and resistance as survivors of harassment come together to combat the isolation that harassment can create and trade strategies for responding. Like a consciousness-raising session that occurs over an extended space and time, the images and statements within *Stop Telling Women to Smile* map out a framework for re-inscribing experiences

of harassment. In tracing past incidents, they mark the potential for a differently enacted and experienced version of public space.

While Philip and Fazlalizadeh's works re-inscribe new possibilities on top of other violations, Mendieta and Sulkowicz both create works that resemble violations very closely. In choosing this mode, they performatively push their audiences to become self-reflective about their role as witnesses of violent incidents. In Mendieta's (1973b) *Rape Scene*, she invited classmates into the "private" space of her apartment to witness a performance in which she had tied herself to a table and smeared herself with cow's blood. She arranged her room in disarray, with broken plates and bloody clothes littering the floor. Mendieta conceived and performed this piece during the month following the rape and murder of Sarah Ann Ottens, a fellow student at the University of Iowa who had been raped and murdered in her own dorm room. In smearing her own body in blood and posing in a position as if she had also been raped and murdered, Mendieta used her physicality to re-inscribe the aftermath of a violation like the one Ottens experienced; in positioning her audience, Mendieta implicated them in this re-inscription as witnesses of violence. While Mendieta's work was not an "actual" rape, her embodiment of a vulnerable and violated position did put her audience in a situation prime for noticing their own reactions to violence and trauma. The performance itself became durational when Mendieta's classmates sat down in her apartment and began discussing the piece; Mendieta herself stayed in position for over an hour.

Sulkowicz (2015) employed a similar mode in *Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol*, a website in which she embedded a video that depicts a sexual encounter turned violent and non-

consensual, as well as the silent aftermath in which she curled up on the mattress, made the bed, and went to sleep. The video, shot in surveillance-style footage from four vantage points around the room, is time-stamped for the same date of Sulkowicz's own rape by another Columbia University student. In her statement on the website, she is very careful to explain that the video "is not a reenactment but may seem like one" (<http://www.cecineestpasunviol.com>). Like Mendieta, Sulkowicz moves along the contours of a violation — she repeats it, but with a difference. Notably, in rendering their performances, both artists place an emphasis on the role of the observer. As Sulkowicz writes, "*Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol* is not about one night in August, 2012. It's about your decisions, starting now. It's only a reenactment if you disregard my words. It's about you, not him" (<http://www.cecineestpasunviol.com>). While arguably much or most art can be understood as partially constituted by its audience, it seems noteworthy that both Mendieta and Sulkowicz use their bodies to create experiences and scenes that resemble ones in which violence has or could occur. One imaginable response that an audience could have to these pieces is to wonder what these artists hope to achieve by putting themselves in such positions in the first place— indeed, many of the comments on Sulkowicz's site articulate confusion, bewilderment, and even dismay. At the same time, it is also possible to interpret both *Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol* and *Rape Scene* as acts through which the artists are locating themselves within positions that already exist, suggesting that there is always the potential for them to be violated in these ways.

To Experiment with Layers

Another dimension of inscription that is evident both in Derrida's framework and the creative works of artists such as Mendieta and Fazlalizadeh involves experimenting with the presence of layers as new inscriptions in relation to pre-existing ones. As these artists demonstrate, layers can involve adding material or taking it away for a brief or extended period of time, with differing relations to visibility, materials, and the site(s) of re-inscription. The intentions and effects of experimenting with layers can be varied: to draw attention to a form or concept, explore an incident, trouble a straightforward or dominant interpretation, etc. As Spivak (1976) notes:

If in the process of deciphering a text in the traditional way we come across a word that seems to harbor an unresolvable contradiction, and by virtue of being one word is made sometimes to work in one way and sometimes in another and thus is made to point away from the absence of a unified meaning, we shall catch at that word. (p. lxxv).

In experimenting with layers, artists can point to these contradictions and meditate on their unresolvability, revealing new dimensions that might otherwise be passed over. Mendieta demonstrated several modalities of layering in her *Siluetas* series (1973-78), outdoor works she made in Mexico and Iowa City in which she used a range of materials such as "earth, sand, stones, water, gunpowder, fire, plants, flowers, trees, blood, human hair, [and] her own body" to repeatedly trace her silhouette onto landscapes in both locations (Raine, 1999, p. 259).

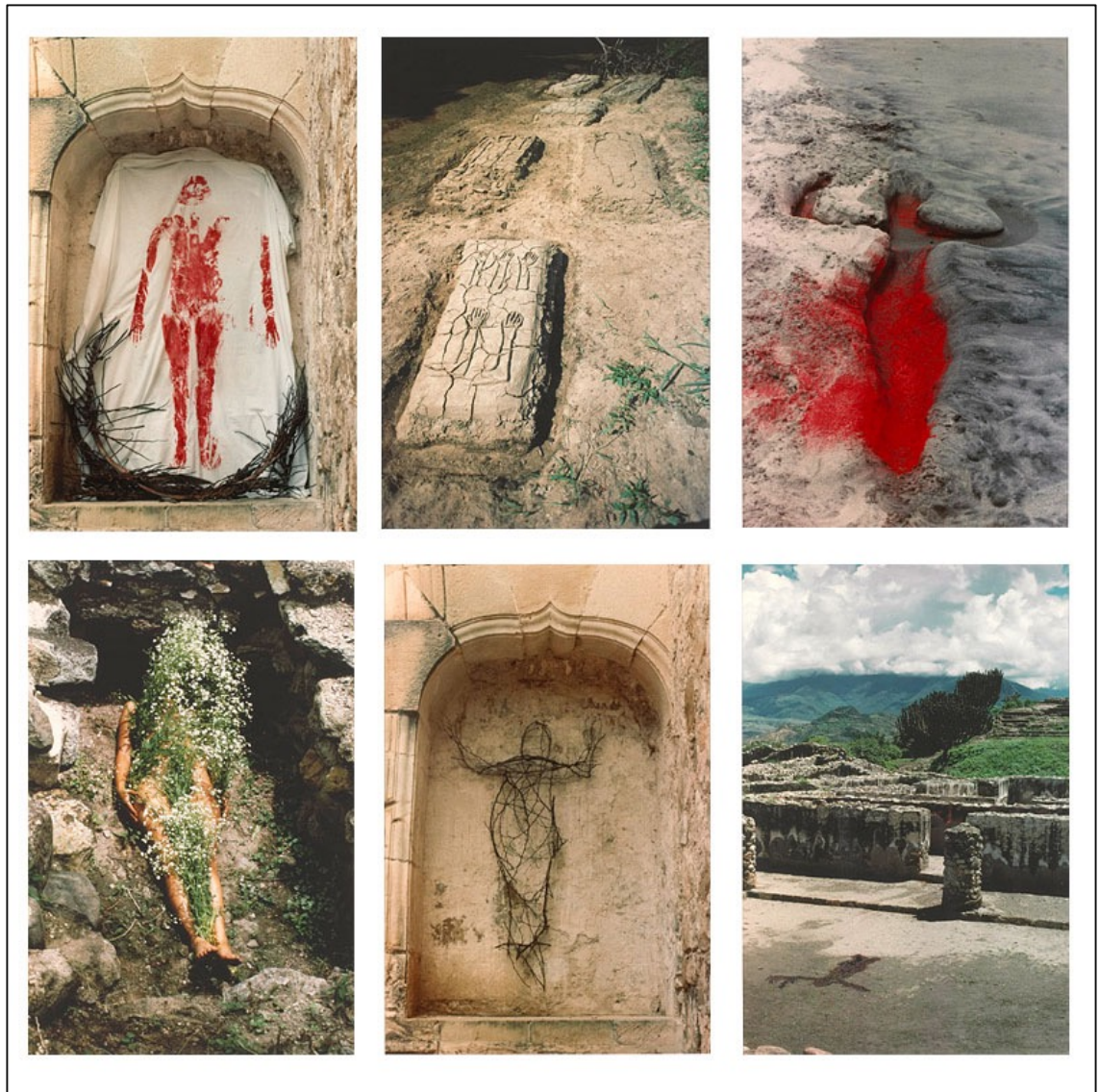


Figure 14. Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas*

In the *Siluetas*, Mendieta created the form of a body (not necessarily legible as particular to or representative of her own body) as a physical layer upon or within the landscape, and also often fashioned elements of the landscape as layers upon the silhouetted form. Across the span of the series, she employed both positive and negative space to render the form, creating imprints by both carving out and/or adding material to designate the

outline of a body. These works signify a relationship between the elements Mendieta used to create the layers (e.g. her body, blood, gunpowder) and the elements she chose to layer upon (e.g. earth, stone, air). Rosenthal (2013) observes that her decisions to either involve her body as a positive layer within the parts of the process she chose to document varied: “In works created without her body, there are instead traces of it, either representing it or pointing to its absence. It is as though she had inscribed herself into the landscape” (p. 12). By layering her body (in either its positive or negative form) on the land, she opened the way for her audience to ask questions about the relationship between the two, and to attempt to make meaning about their juxtaposition.

In addition to inscribing layers, Mendieta also experimented with their relationship to time. Often the quality of the *Siluetas* layers were ephemeral; after a relatively short period of time, they would disappear or dissolve. As Perry (2003) explains, “by destroying the trace of her own body, Mendieta denies it the status of a durable artwork that can be consigned to an art museum” (p. 170). Perry’s read of Mendieta’s work as a critique of the commodification of artwork is certainly justified; at the same time, it is also possible to read her documentation of those works as a layer that is capable of being commodified. Though Mendieta made many of these works without an audience present, her documentation of some part of the process with film and/or photography generated an additional layer in which representations of the *Siluetas* could extend spatially and temporally beyond the sites in which she made them.

As Perry (2003) describes, the *Siluetas* were a “particular form of performance that stages disappearance” (p. 170). Kwon (1996) reads this quality as especially notable

in light of the feminist politics infusing the art world of the 1970s, when Mendieta created the *Siluetas*:

Mendieta's use of her/the body almost always approached erasure or negation: her 'body' consistently disappeared. This is striking given that most feminist artists during the 1970s vied for visibility and self-affirming expression through figurative, literal, sometimes 'in-your-face' presence. It is curious that Mendieta traced her absence instead. (p. 168)

As Perry notes, Mendieta experimented with absence itself as a layer to add to a landscape; in using her body to make imprints or outlines and then removing it, she created an impression (sometimes literal) of something that had been but remained only as a trace. This quality is underscored by the fact that she worked with natural materials that were quick to shift, disappear, or erode, and also by her use of photography to record the performances that would have disappeared by the time the photographs were developed.

Fazlalizadeh's anti-harassment posters function as a mode of layering in a more traditionally "positive" sense in that they add an element to an already existing element. When the artist pasted the posters up along public sidewalks, they add a physical presence to the landscape that represents both a woman and her response to people who have harassed her. This new layer of the poster is available as a form of resistance to harassers and solidarity with other people to whom harassment is directed. Furthermore, while their presence adds a layer to sites of violence, their mutability and impermanence serves as a reminder that responses to harassment (as well as harassment itself) exists as part of an ongoing dialogue to which there is no final or absolute answer. For example, in

Figure 15, at least two layers are present in addition to Fazlalizadeh's installation — the destruction of the poster by ripping, and the replacement of the message with marker. No layer gets to exist as definitive, just as Spivak (1976) suggests when she writes:

The relationship between the reinscribed text and the so-called original text is not that of patency and latency, but rather the relationship between two palimpsests. The 'original' text itself is that palimpsest on so-called 'pre'-texts that the critic might or might not be able to disclose and any original inscription would still only be a trace. (p. lxxv - lxxvi)



Figure 15. *You Are (Not) Entitled to My Body* Poster

This proposal suggests that order or time is not as relevant in determining the importance or power within meaning as considering the relationships between elements of meaning. As Mendieta and Fazlalizadeh explore within their works, the duration and location of

layered elements can be impactful in entering, interrupting, or continuing a conversation. In other words, their work involves questions of when, but also of what, and in what relation. In experimenting with layers, they utilize time, place, and materials to provoke questions, but not necessarily to deliver or uncover clear conclusions.

Erasure

Derrida's concept of trace offers not only a means of describing what concepts and actions exist within and in relation to inscription, but also of considering the ideas put into play to define inscriptions against. In this section, I examine the idea of erasure that Derrida uses to describe attempts to delimit and define inscriptions, as well as the other ideas that linger within and perhaps despite these attempts. As Spivak explains in her preface to Derrida's (1976) *Of Grammatology*, to put a sign "under erasure" is to "write a word, cross it out, then print both word and deletion" (p. xiv). This condition reflects what both Spivak and Derrida understand as the inaccuracies of inscriptions alongside the necessity to create them. As Spivak notes, "Since the [inscription] is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible." (p. xiii - xiv). In this sense, then, erasure refers to the in-absolute and questionable elements within acts of inscription — to the potential for them to convey different meanings than might have been intended, carry different connotations than their inscriber or recipient might know, and remain radically open to new and different possibilities within and in relation to themselves.

To Challenge Implied Borders

If the idea of erasure is to retain a continual openness to difference within each sign and its inscriptions, Fazlalizadeh's *Stop Telling Women to Smile* series explores one

such way to leverage the idea of erasure in the interest of resisting violent treatment. In the initial incidents of harassment to which Fazlalizadeh's interview subjects reply, it becomes clear that people (often men) are in the practice of telling women what to do, how to act, and/or commenting on their bodies in objectifying ways. In responding to these statements, the women in the series clearly challenge these notions at the same time that they draw attention to them as expressions of entitlement and power. By issuing such claims as "Harassing women does not prove your masculinity," "Women are not seeking your validation," and "My outfit is not an invitation," the women in Fazlalizadeh's project speak back to not only specific incidents of harassment, but to the ideologies that make them possible. Fazlalizadeh's act of rendering her subjects' words and portraits with the intent of speaking back to patterns and practices of sexism also challenges the borders that said practices attempt to assert — that harassing women does prove masculinity, that women are seeking public validation, and that women's outfits are an invitation for public comment, entitlement, and other expressions of dominance. By making the women in her project visible in a way that enables them to continually speak back to potential harassers (and to empower other people who have experienced harassment), Fazlalizadeh challenges the borders of sexist discourse itself. Rather than reifying women's bodies as objects of domination, she revisits the inscriptions of harassment to unearth alternative narratives of resistance.

Philip's work in *Zong!* demonstrates a mode of erasure that points to the ways in which implied boundaries within discourse can still be confining and violent, even despite their erasure. In an interview with Philip about *Zong!*, Saunders (2008) notes:

Black subjects have always had to view the Law suspiciously because they were always already situated outside of the law (as property, nonhuman, chattel). But the paradox is that there is no “outside of the law,” since it frames the social and political structures in which we exist in order to make sense of [the fact] that you have to explode it from inside, and connect it to its origins, its buried pasts. (p. 67, italics original)

Philip confines herself to a delimited scope of legal language in order to demonstrate the exclusions that already exist within it. By creating poems from the words and letters within the *Gregson v. Gilbert* case, she pursues a dual project of finding language to describe the murders of 150 African people, while also implicating the legal discourse that obscured those lives and murders in the original case. As she explains, while the purpose of legal discourse is to render experiences “objective” and unemotional, “my process reversed that — you take these hard facts, this desiccated fact situation of *Gregson v. Gilbert* — and you reintroduce those emotions and feelings that were removed” (Saunders, 2008, p. 66). By writing under erasure, Philip is able to locate elements that originally existed within legal discourse but were removed; at the same time, her work does not reveal the “true” situation beneath the lie of the law, but rather renders both the law and its elisions visible simultaneously.

Mendieta’s *Siluetas* series presents a means of considering erasure and boundaries by using her body as a means of inscription. Quiroga (2005) argues that the *Siluetas* functioned as a way for Mendieta to explore her own exile from Cuba, claiming that “she placed her body between two geographies and aimed to join them into one temporality” (p. 183). Within this interpretation, the borders that Mendieta puts under erasure are not only those of her body’s own outline, but also the conceptual and political borders of the

land in which she made the *Siluetas*. At the same time, even this interpretation of her work is contested. As Perry (2003) notes, “If we search for a single identifiable cultural location (such as an exiled Cuban searching for her roots) for the understanding of Mendieta’s art, we will find ourselves confused or misled”, for more ambivalent and ambiguous interpretations of the *Siluetas* remain available (p. 198). In this way, both Mendieta’s performances and interpretations of them serve as considerations of the idea of challenging implied borders as a means for understanding or drawing connections. As Perry implies, multiple motivations and interpretations of Mendieta’s performances are available because the materials and locations she worked with are ambivalent signifiers. While repeatedly crossing political borders in order to create her imprint on and within land, Mendieta also often destroyed this imprint, referencing both her existence and disappearance in multiple locations. At the same time, this interpretation relies on an understanding of Mendieta’s form as specific to her; in the case that her renderings reference a more generic body, then more universal interpretations are available — e.g. considerations of what it means for any given form to exist and disappear in multiple locations marked by distinct political borders.

Ghosts and Hauntings

While the concept of erasure offers a means by which to consider the role and impact of borders that attempt to delimit concepts, discourses, and geographies, it also enables a consideration of those elements that experience erasure, as well as the impacts of their “presence.” Derrida’s description of the trace’s mode of presence and the practice of putting signs under continual erasure proposes considerable challenges to linear

concepts of time. Derrida (1976) explains, “The concepts of present, past, and future, and everything in the concepts of time and history which implies evidence of them —the meta-physical concept of time in general— cannot adequately describe the structure of the trace.” (p. 67). Since Derrida explains that trace neither refers to an “originary presence,” an “absolute past,” nor can “be summed up in the simplicity of a present,” a metaphor that makes sense for considering the ways in which inscriptions can confound a linear sense of time is a ghost, or a haunting. Since ghosts can function as a way in which multiple versions of time can be co-present, they afford a means for referencing elements that shuttle between the past and the present while also putting linear time into question as a way to definitively understand causes, events, and expressions. Additionally, they can serve as reminders of violence that came before, at the same time that they inform the way that things may function or seem, without always being explicit or visible.

For example, it is possible to read the women in Fazlalizadeh’s *Stop Telling Women to Smile* as ghosts who haunt the streets in which harassment happens. While their portraits serve as artifacts of Fazlalizadeh’s conversations with the women she interviewed, they simultaneously function as statements to harassers in the present. They stare back at and speak to passersby in ways that the interviewees may not have felt empowered to do in previous moments of harassment; at the same time, their presence as physical symbols on street posters provide the potential of lingering into the future, perhaps opening the door onto continued resistance and moments of empowerment for other people who see them. Their presence is ghostlike in this way — revisiting both the past and the potential of the future within their existence in the present. They linger for as

long as the material holds, and perhaps even beyond as a memory for those who have seen them.



Figure 16. *You Are Not Entitled to My Space* Poster

Mendieta's (1973b) *Rape Scene* presents a compelling juxtaposition to the street harassment posters, for while Fazlalizadeh amplifies the voices of women presumably still living, Mendieta uses her own body to represent victimized women in general, and perhaps Sarah Ann Ottens specifically. In both works, the artist poses the question of

what it means for a representation of a violated woman to be present at the site of potential or actualized violation — to remain despite attempts to destroy her. Like ghosts, the figures they represent raise questions of how victimization and survival can co-exist, as well as how the presence of violated subjects can complicate and implicate the people and processes that ever made their violation possible. Mendieta described how, during *Rape Scene*, the audience stayed and discussed the work during the actual performance — one wonders what they said and how this might relate to conversations that *Stop Telling Women to Smile* might also have induced. One way to get a sense is perhaps to read through the comments of Sulkowicz’s (2015) *Ceci N’est Pas Un Viol*, in which the audience (purportedly also the subjects of the work) vocalizes a range of disturbing and empathetic responses.⁸

Mendieta’s work in the *Siluetas* also has a hauntological quality in that she uses her body to represent its absence, cultivating landscapes haunted by her form. As Perry (2003) describes:

By representing her body in the form of an elusive object that she subsequently destroys, Mendieta’s [Siluetas] could be seen to problematise the relationship between subject and object. But... the photographic images through which we now gain access to various forms of [her] performance art have reinstated the separation of a viewing subject from the art object. Although providing a record of something transitory that happened outside the gallery space, the

⁸ As Seltzer (2015) noted, while many explicitly feminist online spaces published thoughtful, empathetic responses to *Ceci N’est Pas un Viol*, “On the project’s website itself, there was virtually nothing but garbage. Explicit anti-Semitism, rape apology, crude objectification, harmful memes, poorly spelled insults dripping with misogyny and hatred — and the thread connecting it all: the belief that Sulkowicz is a self-promoter, the wrong kind of victim, not a “real” rape victim. Some rare safe-for-work examples: “Great porno Emma”; “Hitler was right about jews”; “Someone who was raped would be very unlikely to do this”; “i can ruin innocent guys lives too by lying about being brutally raped” (para. 5).

photographic print also re-presents the event as an object we can view within the museum. (p. 181)

In other words, both the original performances and the artifacts of their documentation trouble a clear separation between presence and absence — like hauntings, they each implicate the other, calling the very descriptors of “presence” and “absence”, as well as the binary that separates them, into question. As Mendieta and Fazlalizadeh both propose, the ability to remain legible despite erasure, and/or to incorporate elements that are partially or questionably legible, troubles structures that promise both total coherency and/or total elimination. In ontologically confounding structures of domination, they reference the possibility for both survival and partiality.

Palimpsests

Like ghosts and hauntings, palimpsests allude to incomplete and incoherent modes of inscription. Within a palimpsest, a manuscript upon which physical traces left by writing have been erased so that the surface can be written on again, multiple sets of inscriptions are evident alongside their erasures. As Spivak (1976) elucidates, every surface of inscription is already a palimpsest in that it contains both efforts at inscription and erasures of those inscriptions (p. lxxv). Since, like ghosts, they evoke simultaneous presences and absences, they gesture towards possibilities for new approaches that exist in relation to previous expressions. As Trinh (1999) claims, there is value in methods of revisiting the old to “bring out the ‘new’ and to re-open a different space of meaning” in efforts to reconsider signs associated with identity, experience, and other dimensions of

sociopolitical life that may have become simplified or exclusionary in everyday use (p. 43).

Gordon (1997) utilizes the idea of a palimpsest in her description of Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, which Gordon describes as positioned in relation to an American history of slavery. She writes that as *Beloved* "retells one story...[the narrative also] summons another, it remembers some of what the slave narrative forgot, creating a palimpsest, a document that has been inscribed several times, where the remnants of earlier, imperfectly erased scripting is still detectable" (p. 146). Gordon refers to the way in which Morrison's novel, as fiction, draws upon and alludes to the conventions and history of the nonfictional slave narrative, a genre that, in the nineteenth century, had particular sway in convincing a primarily white, female audience of the violence of slavery. Notably, this project of the slave narrative had as much to do with utilizing narrative genres to construct and relay the subjectivity of enslaved people as it did with describing experiences of violence. As Gordon describes, Morrison's work in *Beloved* reflects an awareness of this genre's history and conventions yet also "problematizes the retrieval of lost or missing subjects by transforming those who do not speak into what is unspeakable, so that in that marvelous power of negative dialectics it can be conjured, imagined, worked out" (p. 150). Gordon's analysis points to the possibility of nuanced creative interventions that read prior events closely, not as absolute facts, but rather, as riddled with political layers and contradictions of their own. This treatment of complexity is akin to what Derrida (1976) famously described as deconstruction. At the same time, Spivak cautions:

The desire of deconstruction may itself become a desire to reappropriate the text actively through mastery, to show the text what it 'does not know.' And as she deconstructs, all protestations to the contrary, the critic necessarily assumes that she at least, and for the time being, means what she says... In other words, the critic provisionally forgets that her own text is necessarily self-deconstructed, always already a palimpsest. (p. lxxvii)

Philip (2008) not only directly invokes the idea of the palimpsest as an element informing the process of her writing, but also renders palimpsests visually by separating parts of words, printing them on top of one another, varying the lightness and darkness of the ink, etc. She explains:

In my fragmenting the text and re-writing it through Zong!, or rather over it, thereby essentially erasing it, the original text becomes a fugal palimpsest through which Zong! is allowed to heal the original text of its fugal amnesia. (p. 204)

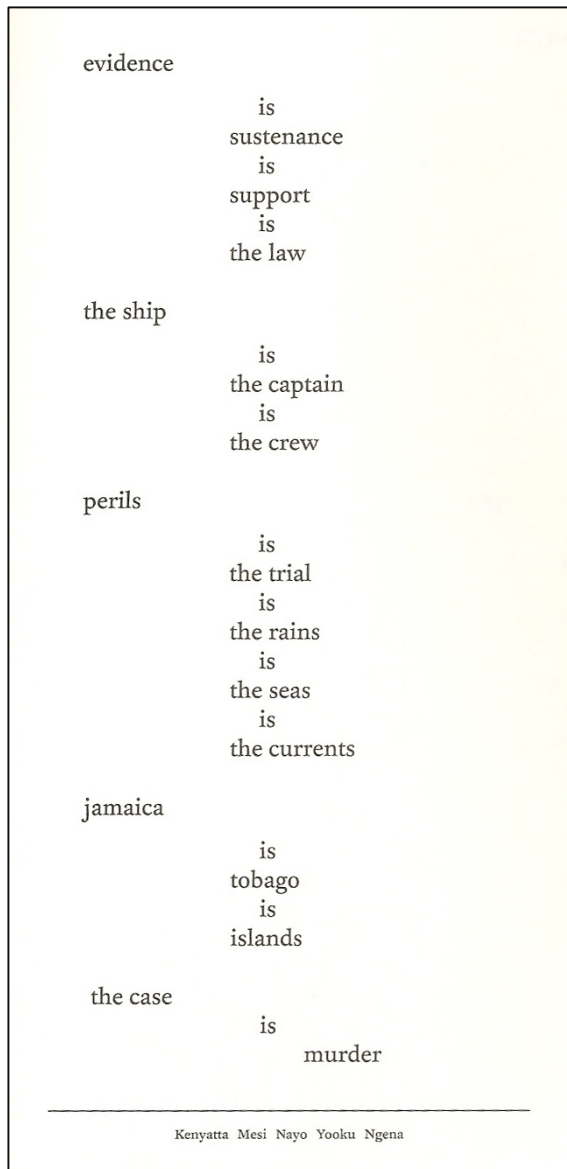


Figure 17. *Zong! #24*

found a naghars leaves gin my us in afric?
 y/our ear a round pig grownyave rum my wish negroes
 thyrgodere aster/s oh oh oule nigtolem cam fo mfound africa the mast must be teak men
 wstetatinthe deed underwho can cure me sunthreesplemmain
 wchairs & watercaptainver for yotho cur that that proved
 justicdag thwacfrom dongsromidefor je ifa that hat
 thevrat the hawmy lieghalard deep pour nifa le cut the cards
 days paramie** ofdingdig under fromifa i I won the throw
 weeks my plea is negligunghatthe fieldher sos sos stitagas softinggluce
 fa monlate frum us i say of whithslemdege
 comes fateemo for osmortafity fellinghwa two saces she smiles
 cut her open in liveill be Essands justice stannin be bsmile
 the noise mth cortens the sunishin I in lives & am a discharge
 imedatthe mort as thimnis oveam savetackking throw thling
 le p'tit mth crew tneighlyp fethelventanmsley Ruth throw them
 ofalit of mortality in rations murder sthine is fate crusts
 but why Blthe namesum am tone & time the seerthere is creed
 tharbones she do the stars appiamig nig if shine there isunder if only
 & fells innitdar mde us & yag watherysax side oh oh
 her shapfaifaifalve our souls thefobwreagain
 with naptanfalinge if only ifa nag thustense ifa ifa ifa i
 serve round bonesents is all wrongport thethe oba sobs again
 and fithetecermen rum rath night overthere was piss cum
 seas more rum & mth fethelgagangin Ruth
 thepates this thilth fawn somora salve the slave they sang &
 withinfantjem and and my destudes sanghe vinedwith sinwe map
 uncommndezempitosalve ora prayou sthahunglurawater/s leak time
 videhe negroisdeo withine a seandisthe fahung putwales on the birth
 mearketthis is dkt overground tinkapssang avcord such
 thib hupthefling her i say groansve a rose i pen thisthousendthefyngthefoster
 pthporthroast for Ruthfat nig dugs heretather teatheserax thever seeythefat
 thurgat gorythmactsyouthere wad lottis mthabum all lord payment
 mthGod no we were write for tinthto yathesgodoua lace cap for mywhat for
 ythGndst hear muf cantisthewindity/s of lare on lquathesppose troly the negroes with
 toys overthpethelacthenthem do you hear the lute
 fndingladyagold fould cut the cord of this storysound to rath oba sobs
 take every thingthefatfounghreen on fromtrest my case
 cum granathelpiedn a songprouthent isapport sow in negligence
 with a grain of salt dire visionsat vesperscheartemphell /sma pth rathmthnightwater parts
 the beking ought evidence thethupthelprongthob dth necessity
 thoneRutreed then vedic munditions negrou ave tdayou
 ththvafat neggagagist sunenth a rosepromthighyou to ile ife
 told cold atth thththth stugroes sow the sea npters my lord
 hghatunghingmy lieghardum notththstanding
 tom hingthsweraith sos dearideyRuth os vaysdeks &
 hthkoo us I dnt she fathratio Ben reason

Figure 18. Final Page of Zong!

Through creating the poems within *Zong!*, Philip renders both her work and the legal document visible as palimpsestic, as rife with incompletions, interruptions, and erasures each in dialogue with a broader political context of racialized discourses. Whereas the legal document of *Gregson v. Gilbert* not only excludes the murders of African people from its language, but also purports to be factual and complete, Philip repurposes, dissects, and utilizes its language to expose both these murders and also the ways that the legal language attempts to disappear them.

As Morrison and Philip demonstrate, the struggle for meaning and interpretation involves contested politics. Thinking about discourse as palimpsestic can help to note what meanings get to emerge as the most true or significant, or get subjugated as less important or real. In various ways, Fazlalizadeh and Sulkowicz both invite the creation of palimpsests by inviting others into their work. By posting each of their projects in places available for public comment (e.g. the internet and public streets), both artists not only provide a platform for dominant discourses to become visible, but they also elicit the question of what makes those discourses get to be dominant. After remaining for some time along the streets, Fazlalizadeh's messages of resistance to street harassment come to exist alongside disparaging remarks about women that passersby draw on top of or next to the original messages. At the same time, it can be understood that the original messages are also an echo of and response to previous experiences of violence. They exist in the midst of discourse, as does Sulkowicz's performance and the dialogue that unfolds in the comment section and remains active at the time of my own writing about it. Their work does not necessarily purport to resolve the question of which perspective or

interpretation is “correct”, but rather, provides a platform on which the many layers of contention and the power struggles that emerge within and through language can become evident.

Play

If inscription and erasure exist as two ways to consider the concept of communicating ideas to the world, then play offers a way to explicitly consider the relationship between the two. Since, according to Derrida, knowledge is not completely knowable in either an empirical or a theoretical sense, the idea of play can help to consider how people produce knowledge as they navigate paths of inscription and erasure. Spivak (1976) explains:

There is, in fact, no ‘book’ other than these ever-different repetitions: the ‘book’ in other words, is always already a ‘text,’ constituted by the play of identity and difference... In Derrida’s reworking, the structure preface-text becomes open at both ends. The text has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end. Each act of reading the ‘text’ is a preface to the next. (p. xii)

In this sense, “play” is both the action and the mode through which a reader (or more broadly, a perceiver of inscriptions, or one who pursues knowledge) makes connections and finds relationships within and between traces. As Derrida implies, this process is neither totally random nor predestined; rather, it is relational, existing within a political context but also capable of finding new and unexpected routes and openings.

Derrida refers to the process of reading with an awareness of play as an openness to “identity in difference,” or a mode of reading that does not take for granted the coherency or singularity of any text. Spivak notes:

From the moment that the circle turns, that the book is wound back upon itself, that the book repeats itself, its self-identity receives an imperceptible difference which allows us to step effectively, rigorously, and thus discreetly, out of the closure. Redoubling the closure, one splits it. Then one escapes it furtively, between two passages through the same book, through the same line, following the same bend. . . . This departure outside of the identical within the same remains very slight, it weighs nothing, it thinks and weighs the book as such. The return to the book is also the abandoning of the book. (p. xii)

Play involves a sensitivity to what both distinguishes and connects differences, as well as what makes them possible. While Derrida seems primarily concerned with the interpretation of texts, I argue that it is also possible to consider play within the production of texts, and that artists such as those whose work I have considered thus far in this chapter offer ways to think about the idea of play as operative within creative praxis. By assuming a dynamic relationship between inscription and erasure, creators can learn not to rely on their works as offering a singular or absolute window in to pre-existing knowledge, but also to approach their operative ideas with a sense of indeterminacy and flexibility.

To Connect

If, as Derrida describes, his idea of trace “corresponds to a condition of forces and translates a historical calculation” since “words and concepts receive meaning only in sequences of differences,” then the idea of play allows for a close consideration of the movement of these words, concepts, and differences in relation to their expressions over both space and time (p. 70). This framework is not meant to reveal absolute ideas, but rather to consider actualized and/or possible connections between them, for it is through the connections within play that meanings can be both made and elided.

The artists whose work I have been exploring in this section utilize connective modes that involve various sites and materials to draw associations between elements and ideas. For example, Fazlalizadeh's street-side installations in her *Stop Telling Women To Smile* series juxtapose past and potential incidents of harassment with past and potential responses to those incidents. Regardless of whether the women who contributed to the project originally responded in the way that they did during their interviews with Fazlalizadeh or not, there are doubtless countless incidents in which, vis-à-vis choice or coercion, targets of violence were unable to respond to objectifying comments. Fazlalizadeh's work creates a connection between the past moments in which experiencers of harassment might have liked to respond and present moments in which their representations do. Ephemeral as the materials she uses might be, their physical presence likely lasts for longer than it takes to say or hear an incident of street harassment; in this way, the project draws connections between past and potential violence by occupying a complex relationship to space and time. While they do not serve as guarantees of safety or resilience, the empowered comebacks serve as both revisions of past events and also as potential models for events yet to unfold.

Mendieta also explores the potential for connections in her *Siluetas* series. In constructing a series of similar works, Mendieta makes available lines of inquiry that attempt to understand the scope of works via comparison. What does a viewer make of the presence of her body in some works as opposed to its absence in others? What about the repetition of performances in two geographically disparate locations? What is the significance of her use of varying materials in each work? Or the use of varying methods

of documentation of the performances (e.g. film, photography, and/or writing)?

Considering the way Derrida poses the idea of play, I raise these points not to suggest the importance of uncovering a single, authoritative answer to each question, but rather as a way of noticing how the terms of Mendieta's work enable the questions to be asked in the first place. Similarly, Sulkowicz's choice to follow *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight* (2014-15) with *Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol* (2015) facilitates analysis around the relationship between the two. In juxtaposing the two pieces, it may become possible for audiences to consider aspects of their understanding of and relationship to both pieces that raise new queries and perspectives. For example, even considering the question of how *Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol* is not *Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight* is to pursue the idea of connections, and can potentially help to consider the complexities involved in Sulkowicz's creative decisions as well as her audience's various interpretations of and responses to each piece.

Gap

Along with considering the ways in which words and concepts can become connected, Derrida theorized the spaces between inscriptions as holding possibilities for meaning. As Spivak writes, "Derrida emphasizes the role of the blank spaces of the page in the play of meaning." (p. lxxvi). Wolfreys (2007) refers to "the gap" as another way that Derrida regarded these blank spaces, explaining that, for Derrida:

The gap is necessary to thought. It takes place as a place and as the possibility of a between; unbridgeable in itself it nonetheless opens itself, within a discourse, within an institution, within cultures and politics, in order to give place to the possibility of an other taking place, the unprecedented event by which transformation, translation, and interruption have their chances. (p.11)

As a concept, the gap can hold the metaphorical door open, helping the student or creator to consider how, while nothing is definite, many things are possible, and inasmuch, it is important to become observant and attentive to the relationship between what is, what has been, and what might become. As Wolfreys suggests, an important dimension of the gap is its “unbridgeability” — its capacity to reference that which may remain unthought and unknown. Inasmuch, the gap can help to consider that which constantly eludes and denies the promises of truth-telling mechanisms to be able to reveal all possible knowledge.

Trinh (1999) approaches a similar praxis, using the idea of repetition as a mode to avoid centering and reifying concepts, even those such as “marginality” which appear in Derrida’s ideas of blankness or gaps. Describing her treatment of the idea of “marginality” in *When the Moon Waxes Red*, Trinh writes:

There was, with every re-departure, a return and a new take on the same notion, which kept on growing with differently situated meanings as it is repeatedly slightly displaced. What may come out of such a spherical advance-and-return movement are ways of understanding marginality whose complexities can reach us in our heterogeneity, our different everyday situations and thinking habits, and lead us beyond the simplistic negation or assertion of marginality as mere opposition to a locatable center. (p. 40)

In emphasizing modes of continual movement and re-consideration, both Trinh and Derrida describe a praxis in which the objective is not to define things for sure but to explore their potential uses as well as their elasticity.

Another means of considering the gap are what Trinh (1999) references as the interstices, voids, intervals, in-betweeness — ideas to keep in mind as a way to avoid fixed notions; Trinh specifies that she does not think about these concepts as specifying a

lack, but instead as a way to remain open to possibility and renewal (p. 40). In different ways, Philip and Sulkowicz demonstrated this mode by revisiting sites of trauma to consider the possibility of different outcomes or forms of meaning to emerge. As Philip (Saunders, 2008) ponders:

The five-hundred year enterprise that was the trans-Atlantic slave trade can be overwhelming, and... I often wonder what the point of it was. Trying to find meaning in the world around us is, I believe, a basic human instinct, and so it's natural to ask whether there was/is some meaning to this horrific experience. And I get to this place where I say: What if? What if the Ancestors intended some other purpose for us to have been brought to this part of the world, entirely apart from the European lust for profit. It seems to me that just asking that question puts us in a different position and releases a tremendous amount of energy. In honoring our own dead, as I said before, by focusing on ourselves and what the experience of slavery has meant and can't mean, even just embracing all that, somehow helps to contain the experience so that we can benefit from the memory rather than being crushed by it. (p. 69 - 70)

Philip's description of the kinds of thinking she engages through her writing shows how, by exploring the play between the inscription of the legal case and its erasures, she is able to locate significant gaps in both the specific narrative that it presents and also in the broader discourse of racism that justifies the inhumane treatment of African people. By prodding this gap with her imagination and through her writing, Philip both recognizes alternative understandings of reality and creates paths for herself and her readers to access them.

Sulkowicz employs similar methods with perhaps less overtly optimistic outcomes in *Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol* (2015). Anticipating that viewers may be quick to read the video installation as a reenactment, Sulkowicz steers them into a gap, claiming that, rather than serving as a record of her own experiences, the piece serves as a window

through which the audience can see a reflection of themselves. In acknowledging that much of the conversation about sexual assault (both her own and more generally) revolves around discerning the “truth” underlying events, Sulkowicz attempts to redirect focus to this discourse itself, not as a potential revealer of truth (of which she claims there is none in her performance), but as an indicator of social attitudes about rape. The conversations that unfold in the comments section of the website and in other articles and online commentary apart from the site itself retrace many different narratives and responses to the work: sexist, empathetic, bewildered, etc. While Sulkowicz aims to delimit the focus of the piece, she does not monitor the conversations, allowing them instead to progress infinitely, to trace and retrace themselves, and to explore new potentials of interpretation, reflecting not only specific modes of understanding, but, as Derrida suggests, “the totality of what makes [them] possible” (p. 9).

Conclusion

Derrida (1976) writes:

The general structure of the un-motivated trace connects within the same possibility [as the movement from sign to symbol] , and they cannot be separated except by abstraction, the structure of the relationship with the other, the movement of temporalization, and language as writing. Without referring back to a “nature,” the immotivation of the trace has always become. In fact, there is no unmotivated trace: the trace is indefinitely its own becoming-unmotivated. (p. 47)

As Derrida might suggest, any existing motivations that the artist I have discussed are also already superseded by other meanings, interpretations, and effects. Likewise, their works themselves exist within a structure of meaning for which the artists can never

authentically claim full ownership or understanding. It seems to me that many of the artists acknowledge and attempt to grapple with this reality in their process and works. They each express an interest in transformation, and a clear concern for justice, yet they also demonstrate the ways in which “directness” or “transparency” are neither always necessary in envisioning change nor easy to achieve in any universal sense. Rather, each work involves an assessment of the modes of communication and expression already at play, and a consideration for how creative works might exist both with and in response to those modes. Like the general work of pedagogy, they involve an assessment of the context from which they emerge and to which they speak, but not a promise of a particular result or absolute guarantee of how they might be taken up. Instead, they offer ways to consider how, as creators, students and teachers might critically proceed with the work of noting context and articulating questions about that context in a way that both remains open to continual transformation. As an exploration of process, they also offer a way to consider knowledge as slippery and indeterminate, yet still meaningful and important.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

I began this study with what Gude (2012) describes as an “inkling” in mind — a “simultaneous knowing and not yet knowing” what ideas I might like to open, craft, and consider regarding the role of creativity in anti-oppressive pedagogy (p. 79). It is these inklings within both students and educators to which I would like to draw attention in beginning this conclusion. The “inkling” that Gude describes is an element that emerges in relation to an idea — an original line of inquiry that educators authoring assignments might not be able to foresee, but which a student might be able to nurture within a process of navigating the relationship between what they know with that they don’t, simultaneously learning more about their own capacities to be creators, learners, and teachers. As I see it, one of the main benefits within this kind of approach is one that also dovetails with foundational claims of critical pedagogy — that students have the potential to become more empowered by and experience agency and transformation within education, and that teachers can learn to regard their roles as facilitators of these kinds of experiences rather than as purveyors of empirical knowledge (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2000). In order to sustain inklings, it is helpful to cultivate several of the elements that Finn and Sara described in their discussions of pedagogy — namely, observation, experimentation, and trust.

However, pursuing inklings does not automatically overlap with or link to anti-oppressive pedagogy. Similar ideas and terms of creativity and innovation proliferate entrepreneurial discourses that are very much complicit with capitalistic ideologies that attempt to rationalize meritocracy and increasing wealth disparities. In order to explore the idea of inklings with a critical lens, it is worthwhile for educators to introduce anti-oppressive topics and frameworks (e.g. examples of dissent, critiques of racism, feminist pedagogy) while also providing space and support for students to make connections to and observations about their own lives and experiences through creative processes. Though creative and anti-oppressive modes do not have an inherent connection, it has been my own inkling throughout this process of researching and writing that pursued together, they can provide students with powerful frameworks and methods for creating greater understanding, deconstructing educational processes, and imagining new ways to trouble oppressive practices. They can function as modes for students to not only deeply consider the world around them but also to learn more about their own ideas and capacities. Through a creative, anti-oppressive pedagogy, they can enter into a process in which it becomes possible to interface with an evolving sense of awareness, questioning, and attempting to reconcile the world that currently exists with the potential to realize a world that is more just (Greene, 2013; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012; Springgay, 2004).

Giroux (1980/1999) presents an idea that is helpful for understanding this process in his explanation of “the dialectic,” which functions:

to help people analyze the world in which they live, to become aware of the constraints that prevent them from changing that world, and, finally, to help them collectively struggle to transform that world. As a form of critique, the

dialectic functions to bring awareness underlying contradictions that support existing forms of alienation. It is based on the use of a language and discourse that is capable of looking at the world in a different way: that is, from a perspective that transcends the world of 'facts' and 'natural' laws that serve to smother reality and to flatten contradictions. (p. 10)

Through engaging in forms of learning that require them to assess their surroundings as well as the methods and materials available for making claims and/or generating change, students learning through both critical and creative methods can explore the process and elements that Giroux describes. While not all students will find this process valuable, make meaningful connections, or become empowered through their participation, it is possible that some will, and for this potential, as well as for the value of pursuing various modes of inquiry, I propose it is valuable to try.

Alongside my general inkling that creative and critical pedagogies could provide students with engaging and important ways to participate in learning, I developed an interest in envisioning ways for students and educators to make and explore salient connections between their own lives and manifestations of oppressive thinking and practice. I found myself wanting for both students and educators to have access to more and better ways to note, understand, and intervene in the processes that comprise their everyday experiences. For many of those involved in education, narratives regarding the institutions that surround and impact them very intimately elude much analysis or commentary at all. Students in many K-12 settings are subjected to increasing amounts of standardized curriculum and testing. College students often struggle under burdens of increasing tuition and debt, while at the same time feeling pressure to make their studies count toward their professional goals. Educators at all levels are often required to attend

faculty meetings at which they receive no opportunity to ask questions or discuss their own ideas. In all of these scenarios, opportunities abound to understand and to trouble the processes, assumptions, and ideas at play, but seldom do educators or students have the chances or tools to learn about these systems or their own relationships to them.

Additionally, many other forms of oppression (e.g. classism, racism, sexism, ableism, etc.) undergird and intermingle with the structural expressions of power that students and educators encounter, yet opportunities to genuinely consider these are also often passed by or suppressed. For students and educators who are marginalized according to various forms of oppression, these elisions serve to continue their marginalization; for people with privilege, the lack of awareness and action both keeps them unaware and sustains their power.

It is from this set of concerns that I pursued my inkling toward the idea of presence and the present. Not wanting to reify a particular version of these concepts or present them as if they were an absolute answer to a complex set of problems, I found that Piper's (1989/1996a, 1992/1996a, 1993) idea of the indexical present and Derrida's (1976) idea of the trace provided two frameworks for considering the possibilities of better understanding the ways in which students and educators can develop skills for investigating the elements of their everyday lives within and beyond formal education. In the case of those who are already intent on pursuing anti-oppressive praxis, hopefully these ideas can offer tools for furthering that praxis and for emboldening educators to try new approaches. In the case that they are unfamiliar, perhaps these ideas can open some new possibilities.

Summary of Findings

When Freire (1970) claims that “Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality,” he references the potential for education to function as a process through which students and educators can become not only more aware of the world they see, but also more aware of how their interpretation plays into their understanding of that world (p. 137). One might infer that the “unveiling of reality” is “constant” because the world is always changing, and understandings are a part of this change. For me, Freire’s ideas resonate with how both Derrida and Piper are invested, albeit much differently, in how reality comes to be understood, in deeply rethinking ways of approaching and understanding “reality,” and in considering how these understandings impact people’s ways of being in the world. As I learned throughout analysis of their ideas and in discussion with Sara and Finn, pedagogies that emphasize a greater understanding of the world and one’s self in relation to it involve becoming attentive to the very process of learning itself, including the methods and frameworks that are often overlooked.

Cultivating Attentiveness to Available Resources

Considering the various qualities available for experimentation (e.g. duration, public-ness, personal behavior, bodily comportment, etc.), it seems seldom that most students have opportunities to explore these qualities as potential modes of learning. Often, they risk being reprimanded by authority figures if they step outside of a very narrow range of methods recognized as having learning capacity — not surprisingly, these are also often methods associated with what Freire (1970) famously termed the

“banking method”, such as memorizing information, taking multiple-choice tests, completing worksheets, and writing five-paragraph responses to teacher-generated prompts. This pattern strikes me as an incredible and insidious form of deskilling. While mandated standards may sometimes include “critical thinking” as a learning objective to be gained from formalized education (Ferguson, 2013), the opportunities for teachers and students to work together to grow those skills seem drastically curtailed by assumptions that knowledge exists primarily in textbooks and exists to be uncovered by answering the guided reading questions at the end of each chapter, or creating flashcards of vocabulary terms to memorize for the next test.

The educators and artists I entered into dialogue with for this project helped me to envision other ways that education might look and go. In thinking back to all of these dialogues, it seems tantamount for creators to develop habits and frameworks that will help them to be attentive to the resources that are available to them. As Finn and Sara pointed out during our conversations about student cell phone use, students already often do often pursue modes of communication and learning that appeal to them, but without the trust and guidance of their teachers, it can be more difficult for them to develop mindfulness around the methods they pursue independently, making it easy for them to draw artificial boundaries between schooling and their own decisions or (preferred) modes of learning. Constantly navigating this dance between performing for school and pursuing their own learning takes energy, and it also steals time away from what could be a generative, exploratory dynamic in which educators guide students toward deep reflection on their own ideas and actions. In order to become aware of available resources

and ways to use them critically, it helps for both students and educators to believe in their capacity to create original, critical, thoughtful, and meaningful work.

As the artists from this project have demonstrated, a consideration of available dynamics and materials is vital to understanding what kind of impact one has the potential to make. Many of the projects I examined use common materials in accessible locations, yet their execution involves deep thoughtfulness about their intentions, methods, and project execution. When Regina Galindo marched from the Congress of Guatemala to the National Palace, she reflected clear ideas about not only what she wanted to say, but also how the location and materials involved in making the piece would help to convey her message. When Tatyana Fazlalizadeh created *Stop Telling Women to Smile*, she had thought about the steps involved in selecting participants to interview and represent, as well as how to reproduce her works for installation on the streets. For students to pursue works with a similar degree of thoughtfulness and resolve, it is helpful for them to not only understand the amount of time and focus that works like Galindo's and Fazlalizadeh's takes, but also to be able to translate this kind of process to their own experiences and capacities. In other words, it is important for them to feel empowered to experiment on their own terms and in ways that best express their own concerns. The goal of this approach to education is not necessarily for students to overtly copy other works (even those they may appreciate), but to genuinely consider how to employ experimental methods to communicate their own process of inquiry.

Balancing Challenge and Support in Facilitating Inquiry

In order to both experiment with and sustain these kinds of inquiry within education, it is useful to consider how forms of education that prioritize open inquiry and creative expression might relate to the forms to which students are already accustomed. hooks (1994), Mercogliano (1998), and Wolk (2007), along with many other critical pedagogy scholars, describe educational practices that prioritize student obedience, complicity, and conformity over exploration of ideas and nurturing of inquiry about self and surroundings. The discussions I had with Finn and Sara, on the other hand, challenged these practices, exploring the ways in which it can be helpful for educators to facilitate learning in multiple modes; for example, by trusting in students' abilities and not micromanaging their work, exposing students to new frameworks for understanding and creating, assisting students in increasing mindfulness and an appreciation for process, and generating evocative prompts and frameworks in which students have flexibility to explore their ideas. This blend of challenge and support demands that educators demonstrate not only trust in their students, but also an attentiveness to their work, asking them questions that will help themselves to sustain the resilience and curiosity necessary to pursue their inquiries.

Impossibility of Absolute Assessment

In comparison to a culture of hyper-assessment that is especially present in contemporary educational discourse and policy, the kinds of pedagogy and curriculum that I am proposing involve putting the idea of assessment itself under erasure. While assessment culture insists that teachers should assess students often, and also assumes

that whatever assessment the teacher generates represents the absolute truth regarding the success of a student's project, I am suggesting that both efforts to assess and the products of said assessment be regarded with suspicion, as they are fraught with both power and also the illusion that they are "true". I am not alone in suggesting that an approach that both prioritizes and reifies assessment as an absolute truth-teller is theoretically and fundamentally flawed, not only because it is often disenfranchising to students (Chalhoub-Deville & Deville, 2011; Cummins, 1986/2001; Spring, 2005), but also because it places the teacher in a fictitious position of authority regarding the "truth" of a student's efforts, thoughtfulness, or success in executing an educational process. Just as Derrida (1976) suggested that "mastery" is an impossible goal, the idea of completely "accurate" assessment is also a myth that, when constantly reinforced over a student's lifetime, and privileged within educational policy and practice as an accurate indicator of intelligence (or even effort), can have detrimental results.

As both Finn and Sara pointed out, a departure from traditional assessment models seems to encourage a more trusting, generative environment at the summer academic program where we all worked. We all noted that students seem to feel more free to experiment and take risks without the threat of grades impacting their work process. As Sara mentioned, they also seem more likely to empathize with each other and express interest in each other's work, since they do not have to compete for class rank or highest grade point average. My fear is that, in the case of this particular program, this lack of traditional assessment is allowed by the state not only because the program exists outside of the regular school year, but also because the students labeled "gifted and

talented” are assumed to be in less need of external assessment than students in “lower” courses of study. Despite these insidious aspects, I would like to propose that it is possible to transfer certain aspects of this non-assessment model into other educational settings. For example, the idea that educators can trust students to pursue their own areas of interest, and that they can help to facilitate that pursuit is an idea present within the optional seminar structure, yet could easily exist in other contexts. Furthermore, the concept that students deserve privacy and space to explore their own ideas outside of the purview of any kind of teacher assessment could also transfer to a variety of educational contexts.

In the case that students and/or teachers have determined that some kind of assessment might be beneficial to the process of learning, alternatives to the traditional model of a teacher assessing their students on supposedly empirical criteria do exist. Other possibilities for assessing student work include inviting students to reflect verbally and/or in writing about various dimensions of their projects and processes, such as how they came to determine particular elements of their work, how they revised their process, how their work impacted others, etc. Instead of the teacher assessing whether the project was ultimately “good” or not, students and teachers could also work together to figure out the parameters and elements that would be helpful to receive feedback on regarding their creative process.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that educators should not give students feedback on their work, help them to build skills, or challenge them to think more deeply, and to demonstrate those thoughts through various kinds of work. Rather, I am proposing that

relying on un- or under-interrogated ideas of what “assessment” is and does can interfere with these very objectives. I maintain that it is possible to both put the idea of assessment under erasure, and also to demonstrate this theoretical position through both curricular arrangements and in transparent conversations with students. In my own experience, when I have initiated discussions about grades (as one particular form/representation of assessment) with students, they are quick to articulate that while grades aren’t “real”, they are impactful to students’ lives and future opportunities. Discussing “tests” has elicited similar insights — students often claim that their performance on formal tests does not accurately reflect their actual knowledge or capacity — the knowledge and capacity that they claim they themselves are able to assess more accurately than an “objective” measure of their knowledge or intelligence, such as a grade or a test. Using the analysis students have already begun to develop, it then becomes possible to build a more in-depth consideration of the politics of assessment.

In a way, grades and tests can serve as a window into a world in which students can credit the presence of particular practices (beyond those of “assessment”) to social construction and learn to consider ways in which they, along with others, might change or re-approach those practices, particularly when they are harmful. In addition to interrogating assessment practices, it is also possible to approach them differently; for example, by involving students in the process of assessing themselves, providing ungraded feedback, or adapting the group critique model more commonly found in arts education, in which a group of people give constructive feedback on a particular student’s work. I do not mean to frame even these alternative approaches to assessment as if they

are automatically superior or without their own entanglements in some of the more egregious elements of standardized assessment — to reiterate, I mean to suggest that the idea of assessment itself remain under constant suspicion.

Suggestions for Implementation

During the process of developing this project, I frequently circled back to possibilities for providing students with specific frameworks through which to increase an awareness of systemic processes in their own lives, expand their sense of materials and methods available to them to explore and address those processes, and facilitate an ongoing reflective process in which they are able to hone their ideas and skills to express themselves more specifically and experimentally. One way to foster these approaches is through the scope and direction of assignments. Another is through exposure to and conversation around projects that other people (e.g. their classmates, artists in this project) have created, as well as the methods and materials they are using and how they are approaching inquiry.

Assignments

As Finn and Sara debated in our discussion about teacher “craftiness”, there is a continuum of transparency available in regards to the objectives a teacher has in mind when conceptualizing and explaining an assignment. In a Derridean sense, it is also always possible for the ways that students take up any given directive to exceed the assignment’s expressed objectives. While much of contemporary standards and accountability discourse takes for granted a one-to-one relationship between an articulated objective and its anticipated outcome, I recommend interrogating this

assumption and leaving, if not encouraging, room for other outcomes to transpire. In other words, what students learn through the process of fulfilling any assignment is not delimited to a particular end product — no matter how closely the assignment may be framed with a particular learning outcome desired by educators or policy-makers, students always already have the potential to learn and experience ideas beyond those (stated or implied) objectives.⁹ With a certain amount of mindfulness on the part of the person or people who are crafting the parameters of the assignment, this quality of unanticipated results can become a meaningful part of the experience of pursuing the assignment. As Joseph (2000) describes, this form of curriculum can involve a search for “meaning rather than control” (p. 3). By openly relinquishing claims to know where students might go during or as a result of their time spent thinking about a set of questions or ideas, educators can recognize their students as original, agentic thinkers and can also affirm education as a process full of unknowns.

In considering how to craft assignments that can help students to become more curious and critical about the ways in which they are situated within and connected to the world around them, I offer the following set of prompts, which are borrowed from the frameworks I have mentioned earlier in this project:

- Explore the intimate within the public
- Experiment with proximity

⁹ This potential is a part of Eisner (1985) refers to as the “learned curriculum,” in which the outcomes of explicitly stated curricular goals can include teachings made implicit through school and classroom culture, as well as what is not taught, e.g. the “null curriculum.”

- Attempt to direct an audience's focus
- Cultivate an extended experience
- Implicate an oppressive system or practice
- Irritate those in power
- Generate a project that will have delayed effects
- Generate a project that will have imprecise outcomes
- Repeat with a difference
- Experiment with layers
- Challenge implied borders
- Notice or generate ghosts and hauntings
- Notice or generate palimpsests
- Connect unlikely elements
- Explore gaps, ruptures, and deviations

I arrived at these prompts by considering the works of artists (e.g. Sulkowicz, Galindo, Mendieta, etc.), and imagining how their works could have emerged from suggestions that, while seemingly simple, allow room for the consideration of complex dynamics and relationships. To be clear, I am not claiming that these artists worked from the particular directives I have articulated; rather, the prompts are my interpretation of ideas that they could have involved in their process. I propose these ideas as suggestions that teachers and students could use at any point during the exploration of a project: in crafting or

framing assignments, in the midst of creating a project, or as a means of reflecting on a project after it has been completed. These suggestions are attachable to and explorable within an endless array of contexts. It is possible to leave the directions minimal and see where students take them, or to situate them more explicitly in relation to a particular set of issues or ideas.

Frameworks similar to the ones I am suggesting appear in two locations of potential pedagogical inspiration: *Beautiful Trouble*, a “web toolbox” and book geared toward helping activists better explore and understand strategies available to them, and *Rookie*, an online publication for teenagers whose content is curated from a wide variety of regular contributors and includes photo essays, diary entries, fictional and non-fictional narratives, advice columns, interviews, etc. As digital projects, both are organized according to several kinds of categories that are sortable in multiple ways. *Beautiful Trouble*, for example, includes the following categories: Tactics, Principles, Theories, Case Studies, and Practitioners. The site designers interlink each category in such a way that multiple elements are visible when viewing any one particular article — for example, they linked the principle “know your cultural terrain” to other principles, such as “show don’t tell” and “recapture the flag”, as well as related theories of hashtag politics, tactics of flash mobbing, and case studies of the Barbie Liberation Organization and the Harry Potter Alliance. Each element is also visible in a constellation-type formation that moves with the movement of the cursor.

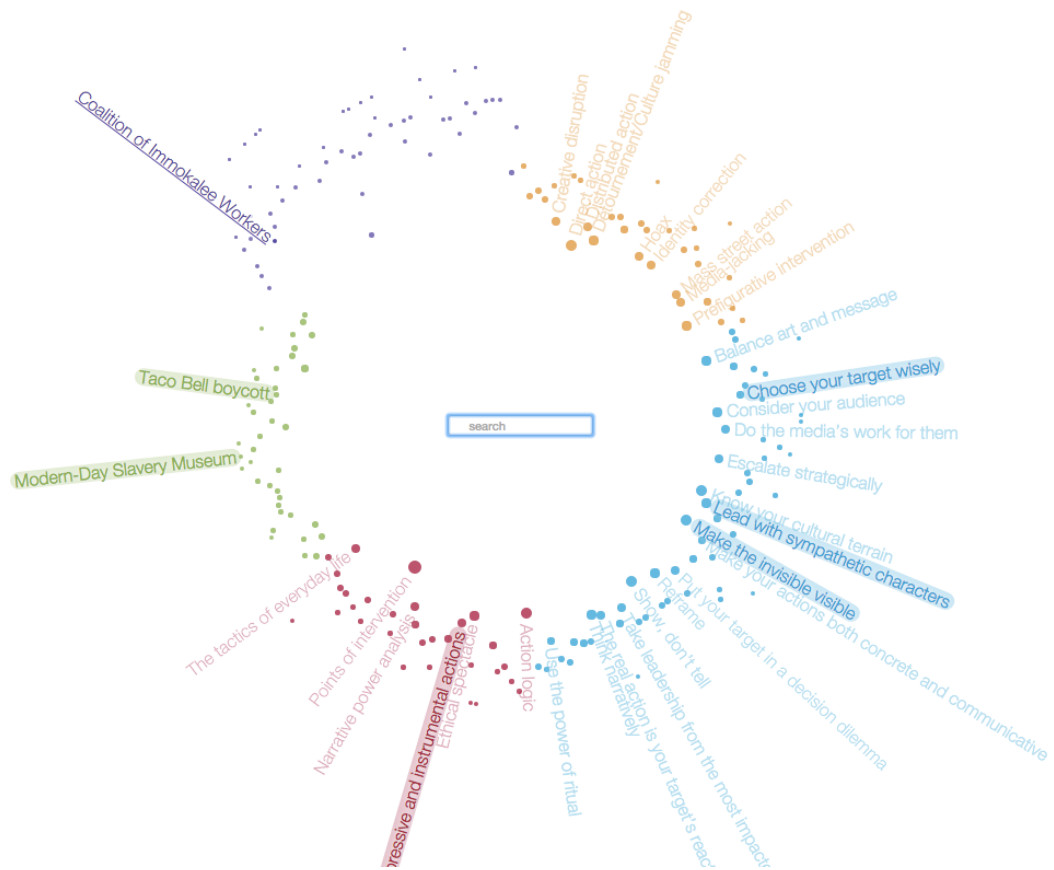


Figure 19. Screenshot from <http://explore.beautifultrouble.org/#-1:000000>



Figure 20. Rookie Categories

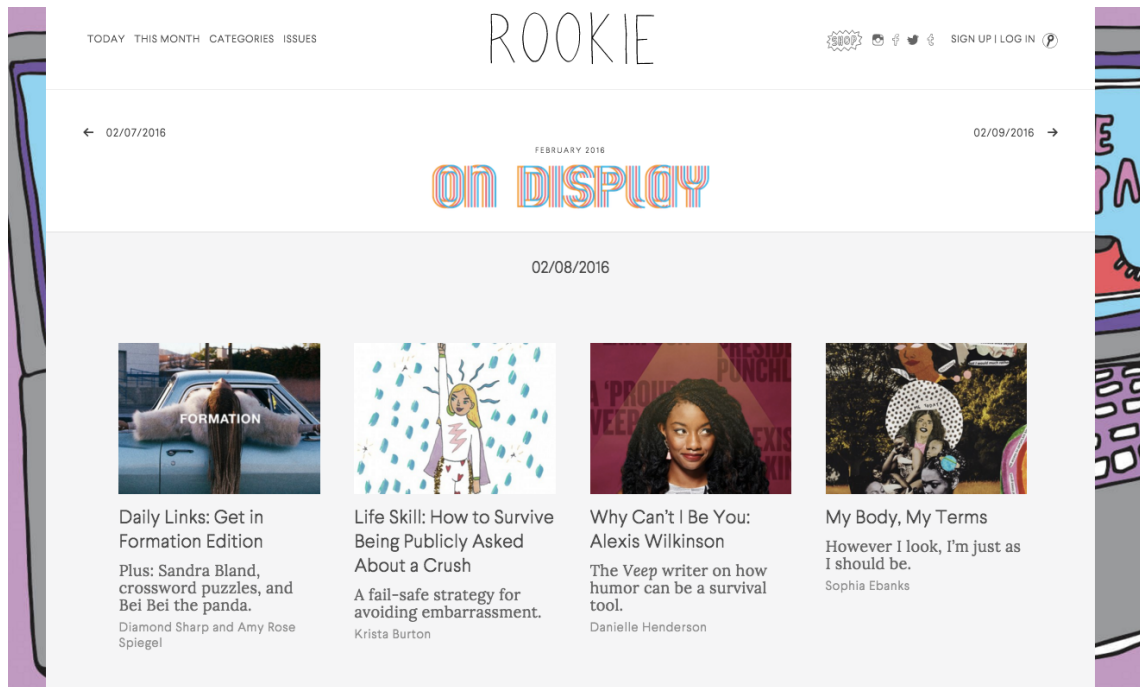


Figure 21. Screenshot from *Rookie*, February 2016

At *Rookie*, the organization revolves around conceptual and aesthetic themes district to each month (e.g. “Both Sides Now” in April 2015 and “Slow Motion” in June 2015), yet is also sortable by constant categories, such as “eye candy,” “live through this,” and “you asked it,” as visible in Figure 20. While the view of *Beautiful Trouble* shifts with each move of the cursor, *Rookie*’s presentation of content initially appears more static. However, like *Beautiful Trouble*, *Rookie*’s sort-ability according to a variety of views (by theme, category, tag, author, etc.) provides clear links between ideas while also resisting essentialized framings of where particular ideas and strategies belong. Both the content and the presentation of each site serve as an example of the frameworks in which I am suggesting it is possible to invite students to experiment. While no view reads as the most right or correct, both *Beautiful Trouble* and *Rookie* offer clear suggestions for action and

provide specific examples of people and groups who have pursued action in various ways.

In particular, the “principles” at *Beautiful Trouble* read similarly to the prompts I proposed above, including suggestions such as “reframe”, “seek common ground”, and “escalate strategically” to describe one facet of the work and foundation of the strategies for social change the overall project is dedicated to exploring. Like the suggestions above, simple directives like those offered under “principles” can help both students and activists to not only think differently about their own capacities, but also to explore the vast array of potential modes of learning and initiating change that often go under-explored. As *Beautiful Trouble* demonstrates, the ways that people take these principles up can vary drastically depending on the other elements involved, such as the selected site, materials, questions explored, etc. For example, the simple principle “reframe” links to other principles, such as “make the invisible visible” and “think narratively”, as well as practitioners such as Design Studio for Social Intervention and case studies such as “Battle in Seattle” and “streets into gardens.” The site’s layout suggests that while there is absolute way to “reframe”, there are particular ways to “reframe”, and readers of the site can gain inspiration from the examples in which others have reframed, while also expanding their understanding of how acts of reframing might unfold.

As compared to *Beautiful Trouble*, *Rookie* may seem to provides less of an overt set of suggestions for action; rather, as a collective work, its contributors and editorial team demonstrate how engagements with said prompts might play out. It is possible to read the production of *Rookie* as explorations of all of the curricular seeds I explained

above, such as exploring layers, setting cultivating an extended experience, irritating those in power, etc. For example, both the premise and the continual publication of the site can be understood as acts of experimenting with layers and repeating with a difference. Described simply as “a website for teenage girls” for the first four years of its existence,¹⁰ *Rookie* published hundreds of stories not only “for” teenage girls, but also exploring the concept of adolescent girlhood. For *Rookie*, the sheer number and vast scope of the works the editorial board includes expand the sense of what count as “teenage girl” issues and perspectives; in some ways, they also offer an expansive sense of who can count as a teenage girl. As McDaniel (2013) explains:

One might question that in its seemingly simple description of itself as a magazine for teenage girls, *Rookie* assumes a singular definition of girl identities and girlhood experiences. [However], the intentional effort to not overly define *Rookie* allows for a capaciousness on which it relies, while still supporting that some adolescent, particularly female, experiences can be somewhat universal. (p. 2)

Rookie never defines some of its organizing principles — e.g. girlhood or feminism — but rather wanders around and through expressions of these things, presenting multiple perspectives and dimensions with no end in sight. As Gevinson (2011) writes in the very first editors letter:

I don’t have the answers. *Rookie* is not your guide to Being a Teen. It is not a pamphlet on How to Be a Young Woman... It is, quite simply, a bunch of writing and art we like and believe in... From here, you write your own handbook. (para. 2, para. 6)

¹⁰ During a general site overhaul in September 2015, the description changed to “Rookie is a website for teenagers.”

In this way, there is a connection to explore between the way that *Rookie* unfolds and Derrida's (1976) commitment to unforeseeable futures. There is a clear relationship to the reworking of the sites and signs of gender and adolescence, an engagement with the tension between what has come before and with the potential of what these ideas could involve. For the years since its inception, *Rookie* has issued countless repetitions of and variations on the idea of teenage girlhood by providing advice, reflections, and outlets for a demographic that it clearly speaks to but never presumes to define.

Another prompt explored in the execution of *Rookie* is the noticing and generation of palimpsests. The digital format makes *Rookie* constantly capable of referencing back to its own history or to the history of other artifacts available on the Internet (e.g. pop culture memes, scientific statistics, videos that literally or ironically illustrate a point, etc.). Of course this feature is not specific to *Rookie*, but its contributors do tend to use it often, and are elastic in the ways in which they do. For example, in Spiegel's (2015) article, "Let's Talk About Planned Parenthood", she writes, "For a lot of people, abortion is a huge thing to think about! Please believe that I know" (para. 2). The "I know" hyperlinks to an advice column almost two years prior in which Spiegel narrates her own experience of having an abortion. Throughout the article, Spiegel links to other kinds of sources as well — an official Planned Parenthood report, articles fact-checking statistical claims, infographics explaining poverty levels, Congressional bills about reproductive health, speeches of politicians responding to shootings at Planned Parenthood clinics, etc. While the links serve as a form of citation, showing that Spiegel has done her research,

they also function as a network of palimpsests in which Spiegel's argument and the broader political context relate dynamically to one another.

Considering the ways in which they invite audiences to engage with their content, and the suggestions that they both offer and demonstrate, there is a way of looking at both *Beautiful Trouble* and *Rookie* as curricular arrangements. It is not so difficult to guess at the overall goal of each project — to educate and empower activists and teenagers, respectively. However, the execution of both goals and the way that the contributors configure their work to be taken up by readers bears further consideration, as the intricacy and flexibility of their work exceeds the simple objectives they claim as their overall goals. Both explicitly offer multiple points of entry, and indicate that they expect their readers will take them up in a variety of ways. There is no clear way to “get” either of them right, and in fact, different readers likely have very different experiences navigating each site.

In many ways, this experience runs parallel to educational processes themselves, with a difference being that formal education often functions in a way that expects a singular correct answer, rank-able performance, and adherence to a hierarchical set of norms. In considering the various ways in which students and educators already navigate their own presence, as well as the presence of others, I am proposing that, just as there are multiple ways to understand presence, there are multiple ways to experiment with, leverage, and approach presence as part of educational endeavors. The list of suggestions for framing and inspiring assignments above asks students to consider themselves in

relation to others, and takes for granted that there will be multiple, incommensurable ways to explore each objective.

To provide another suggestion regarding how this approach could work, I offer an example from another scholar's work that overtly explores the issue of standardized curriculum and testing within public education. Koch (Desai & Koch, 2012), an Arts Education graduate student and 4th grade teacher, describes her inspiration for an installation called *Cracked*, which helped her to respond to an educational culture that placed stress on her students to perform well on standardized tests and also took away time from other educational experiences. For the installation, she conducted a public survey in which she "distributed a hundred images of a brain and asked [students, parents, and the general public] to write down what they felt children should learn in elementary school" (p. 39). She used these responses to create a video in which she interspersed their responses with videos of her students taking standardized tests, juxtaposing general hopes for a vibrant and experimental education with images of rote testing exercises. As another part of the installation, she created *Ode to Lost Enthusiasm*, in which she invited her 4th grade students to chew gum during required test preparation, then to deposit their used gum on a desk after they had completed the preparation exercises. She explains that "this small form of rebellion brought so much pleasure to the students and it was my way to speak back to the pressures of the *No Child Left Behind Act* experienced by teachers on the culture of their classrooms" (p. 39). Koch's work helped her to not only articulate her critique of standardized testing and the emphasis it

often receives in school cultures, but also to remain persistent in thinking about other alternatives.



Figure 22. *Ode to Lost Enthusiasm*

She demonstrates how it is possible to think beyond narrow parameters of knowledge production associated with testing and to use simple materials (e.g. surveys, gum, video) to create her project. In noting the ways in which she and her students were required to be present in school, she was also able to imagine (and in a small sense, also to actualize) alternative ways to experience and approach these requirements.

Exposure

The practice of exposing students to creative practices and processes can have the benefit of helping to expand their sense of options. As Sara, Finn, and I mentioned, students can sometimes be overwhelmed by prompts that are open-ended or assignments in which the onus is on them to explore unknown ideas. Exposing student to examples of projects in which other people have explored open-ended questions involves a balance between noticing and studying existing examples and encouraging students to pursue their own ideas. On one hand, exposure can play a helpful role in expanding what students understand to be possible, as Sara and Finn mentioned when they introduce artists who use their bodies to explore questions to their students. Sara's ideas that "you can use anything, including just yourself, to make... a message" and "even just [your] presence as a body makes a difference" may not be apparent or even seem possible to students who have been schooled in complicity and a narrow range of comportment. On the other hand, becoming oversaturated with examples can make it difficult for students to notice and pursue their own inklings.

Sara mentioned that she often gives students a class period or two to think about their own ideas and brainstorm in relation to prompts that she gives them. After they have begun to express their own inklings, she integrates the reflections of other artists and thinkers who have approached similar concepts. She explained that by waiting to bring in the voices of more "established" creators, students have the opportunity to compare their own ideas and approaches to these new ideas she introduces without depriving themselves of the chance to explore their own initial responses. In considering how their

ideas align with other creators (including their peers), students have the chance to notice the ways in which their ideas might align with, depart from, or even challenge others. Sara recommended incorporating discussions about these comparisons into the process, as it can help students to not only develop a more nuanced understanding of their own process and decisions, but can also legitimate a multitude of approaches to similar questions.

In order to balance the element of exposure to the work of others with a sense that students also have important ideas to express, it can be helpful to include conversations about how students themselves are also creators. Learning to regard themselves as agentive and capable is part of critical pedagogy framework; at the same time, it is helpful to have some sense of their similarities with other, perhaps more public, creators so that they will not put other creators up on a pedestal or understand the process of creating as somehow so beyond their own capacities. While learning to explore their own ideas, students can also learn how to both be inspired by and give credit to the ideas of others, while also demystifying artists as learners and thinkers themselves.

Closing Thoughts

My objective in this study has been, in a broad sense, to gesture to the wide array of methods available to students and educators for exploring art as a process that can inform, mirror, and inspire pedagogy. Simply put, there are lots of different ways to pursue inquiry that often go under-explored. Within the artworks I chose, I saw examples of modes that learners could pursue themselves, and I also noticed the particularities within these modes. Contemporary education is full of stale curriculum that doesn't

nurture students' creativity or give them chances to mix things up, surprise themselves, care about the world around them, or to cultivate the ways in which they already care. Fresh, complex approaches are necessary for both the purposes of realizing more engaged, just educational practices, and for providing students with opportunities that will help them to be aware of and reflective about the world around them, to harness their creative potential in the interest of creating a more just world.

So what if these methods and approaches I've explored and suggested don't fulfill the promise of enabling a more critical yet engaged pedagogy? What if this version backfires, alienates students or educators, or becomes co-opted into a less critical version? It's likely that all of these things are true for some students. I don't intend to posit a universal solution, and even if I did, it's doubtful that my intentions would hold any guarantees. What I'm suggesting here could be a way though — not a universal solution, but a wedge, an irritant, a spark that could further some students and educators along on within their own modes of inquiry. By considering ways through which to hone an awareness of unorthodox options, materials, and capacities for understanding their social and political contexts, I am suggesting that both students and educators have far more potential to actualize anti-oppressive education than they often realize or allow themselves to explore. As Finn suggested in her story about her students asking to use the scissors that were already available to them, unlearning limitations imposed by institutional expectations can be a long, persistent process. However, as participants in learning to note and address these limitations within and beyond formal education, it is valuable for students and educators to expand their means of inquiry — not only in the

interest of gaining new understandings, but also in becoming more adept at navigating limitations and negotiating their own ways through the complex networks of power in which they learn and know.

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APPENDIX A
CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Site specific art as social justice pedagogy

Principal Investigator: Carrie Hart

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Leila Villaverde

Participant's Name: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?

This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of this study is to gain greater insight into what is involved in organizing curriculum around the goal of facilitating better understanding of oppression and potential responses to it.

Why are you asking me?

I am asking you to participate in this study on the basis of your insight in facilitating creative approaches to understanding systemic oppression, particularly given past curricular projects you have facilitated.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

I will ask you to participate in 4 synchronous conversations lasting 1 - 2 hours each. During these conversations, we will discuss the pedagogical value of visual and performative projects that address connections to systemic oppression. The conversations will occur about a month apart from each other. I will distribute questions via email two weeks in advance of each conversation

so that all participants can have time to consider the scope of our conversation. I will facilitate but also participate in each conversation. In our first conversation, we will explore how our approaches to facilitating curriculum are connected to a lens that is critical of systemic oppression and how those approaches play out in specific pedagogical engagements. In our subsequent conversations, we will examine visual and performative projects that interrogate systemic oppression and discuss our responses to them as well as the pedagogical insights they might lend. I will make a private Google+ group available for additional reflection and resource-sharing between conversations (there is also a possibility that a collective email thread will suffice).

Is there any audio/video recording?

I will record our conversations for audio. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed, although I will try to limit access to the recording by storing them on my personal password-protected computer.

What are the risks to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact the Principal Investigator (Carrie Hart, who may be reached at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or carrie.e.hart@gmail.com) or the Faculty Advisor (Dr. Leila Villaverde, who may be reached at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or levillav@uncg.edu).

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

This study may enable further insight into approaches to social justice education. The specific approaches explored may be helpful to teachers who wish to involve their students in interrogating systemic oppression.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

I will use pseudonyms for participants in written research and store audio recordings of our conversations on my password-protected computer. I will store the master list of pseudonyms separately from any identifiable data and shred this list immediately after completion of the study. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. **Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.**

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you read it, or that it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by .

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Initial conversation:

1. How do you consider your teaching work in relation to helping students to understand oppression? (Broadly and also in specific examples)
2. How do you consider your teaching work in relation to helping students better understand their everyday lives? (Broadly and also in specific examples)
3. Can you tell me about some of the site-specific creative projects you have facilitated with your students? What inspired the projects themselves as well as the creative approach?
4. What did you navigate with your students in facilitating these projects? What do you hope the value and impact of these projects is?
5. Have you facilitated other projects like them, or thought about doing so, in other educational contexts?
6. How do you wrestle with decentering students' typical mode of knowledge production?

Second conversation:

Here are some themes I pulled out of our conversation from last time that I'd like to continue to discuss:

- pedagogies of the everyday — approaches, context, content
- conversation and dialogue as pedagogy

- community and empathy: students and opportunities to care about issues, each other
- cultivating observation / observational practices that help students to be attuned to oppression as it occurs in relation to them (e.g. how it might impact them and others, how they are implicated in oppressive systems)
- the difficulty of getting students to be attentive to systems of oppression
- creative work that involves students thinking about and using their bodies

The other thing I'd like to do is spend some time discussing a few creative works that I've pulled together under the theme of "Presence: Present." I'm drawing from Adrian Piper's idea of the indexical present, which she describes as "the way in which I attempt to draw the viewer into a direct relationship with the work, to draw the viewer into a kind of self-critical standpoint which encourages reflections on one's own responses to the work."

- Emma Sulkowicz (2014 - present) - [*Mattress Performance: Carry that Weight* \(rules of engagement\)](#) - Trigger warning: mentions sexual violence
- Regina José Galindo (2003) - [*Who Can Erase the Traces?* \(*¿Quién Puede Borrar las Huellas?*\)](#)
- Gran Fury (1989) - *The New York Crimes* ([front cover](#)) ([back cover](#)) - Gran Fury curated these articles and replaced the first page of *The New York Times* with this page in street corner vending machines
- Mierle Laderman Ukeles (1973) - [*Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside*](#)

Some questions to get us started with thinking about these pieces:

1. What do you think about these works? What do they bring to mind?
2. What do you like or not like about them?
3. What critiques do you have of them?
4. For you, how do they relate to teaching, learning, and education?

Third conversation:

I pulled the following themes out from our most recent talk., I'd like to talk more about them, as well as the next group of artworks. I also found [this](#) interview with Emma about her most recent piece, and we can continue to talk about other pieces from last time as well.

Main themes:

- utilizing the element of time creatively (e.g. durational & ephemeral)
- cultivating practices of observation, mindfulness and reflection
- attentiveness to the way that others react to creative works
- how the politics and practices of institutions of education impact collaboration and trust
 - sharing space, building relationships, navigating and creating alternatives to top-down mandates
- experimentation, trust, and the expansion of comfort zones for teachers and students
- what is possible in a variety of educational settings and ways for teachers to be strategic with assigning creative work

Questions for next time:

I'd like to talk about these creative works that I've linked under the theme of "Presence: Trace"

- [Rookie](#) - (2011 - present)
 - Ana Mendieta - [Silueta series](#) (1973 - 77) (more [here](#));
 - [Moffitt Building Piece](#) (1973);
 - [Rape Scene](#) (1973) (image available [here](#) - it is disturbing to look at, so no worries if you don't want to - definitely TW for sexual violence)
 - M. NourbeSe Philip - [ZONG!](#) (2008) (Philip discusses the inspiration for Zong! from 3:00 - the end of [this video](#))
 - Tatyana Fazlalizadeh: [Stop Telling Women to Smile](#) (2012 - present)
1. What do you think about these works? What do they bring to mind?
 2. What do you like or not like about them?
 3. What critiques do you have of them?
 4. For you, how do they relate to teaching, learning, and education?

Fourth conversation:

Here are some themes I pulled out from our last chat:

- negotiating comfort and discomfort in pedagogy
- negotiating comfort and discomfort in artistic production
- bewilderment as a catalyst for change
- trust / support
- education as a platform for having difficult conversations
- sites of creativity and education

- strength involved in exerting a presence / trace

In terms of questions, I'm wondering:

1. What other thoughts do you have about the artworks we've discussed? Did they remind you of any other pieces that you'd like to discuss together?
2. After having had some time to think about it, where is your current thinking on creative engagements with systemic oppression? What are your thoughts on and ideas about facilitating visually creative projects as a way to help students connect systemic oppression and their everyday lives?
3. Have you come across any other educational / creative projects that seem related to our discussions? If so, what are they and what are your thoughts on them?
4. In thinking back to the projects you facilitated with students in 2014, would you approach those projects differently now?
5. After exploring these ideas, what are your ideas for future curricular engagements / facilitation?
6. Is there a way for us to use these ideas to collaborate on a project in the future?